

Screen

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Spanish cinema under Franco

Bigelow and the discourse of vision

The Wednesday Play

Transforming television in South Africa

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Luis Mariano as bullfighter hero, in *El sueño de Andalucía* (Luis Lucia, 1950).

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Race, gender and disavowal in Spanish cinema of the early Franco period: the missionary film and the folkloric musical

JO LABANYI

Little work has been done on film of the early Franco period prior to the development of a neorealist opposition cinema from 1951. It is generally assumed that cinema of this period, when repression and censorship were intense, acted as the regime's mouthpiece either through explicit indoctrination or by constructing an escapist vision of Spain as a rural paradise untroubled by modernity. I wish here to examine the two genres most directly responsible for these two forms of ideological projection: the missionary film and the folkloric musical respectively.¹ My reason for coupling these very different genres is that both have links with ethnographic film in their focus on 'other' races and peripheral locations. Mary Louise Pratt has observed that 'while the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery . . . it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis – beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself'. This process, she notes, also characterizes the relations between centre and periphery within Europe. Indeed, as she comments, the relations between colonial metropolis and periphery provided the initial model for the process of nation formation consolidated in Europe in the late nineteenth century.² I shall argue here that the concept of nationhood

¹ My thanks to the Filmoteca Española, Madrid for enabling me to see many of the films discussed.

² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6, 10.

3 For Franco's career in Spanish Morocco, see Paul Preston, *Franco* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), chs 1 and 2. Preston quotes Franco as saying, 'Without Africa, I can scarcely explain myself to myself' (p. 16).

4 Spain's last major colonies – Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines – were lost in 1898. The loss of Cuba triggers the narrative of the film *Raza/Race* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1941), scripted by Franco under the pseudonym Jaime de Andrade. Several other 1940s films, some of them box-office hits, deal with the loss of Cuba or the Philippines, including the 1945 folkloric musical *Bambú* (also directed by Sáenz de Heredia) discussed below.

5 For Francoist protectionist film legislation, see José Enrique Monterde, in Román Gubern et al. (eds), *Historia del cine español* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995), pp. 195–203. For film censorship, see Román Gubern, *La censura: función política y ordenamiento jurídico bajo el franquismo 1936–1975* (Barcelona: Península, 1981); and Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds), *Spanish Cultural Studies: an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 207–14.

6 Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 278.

elaborated in the early Francoist folkloric musical was an application to the mainland of the concept of empire simultaneously elaborated in the missionary film.

As is well known, the Francoist State explicitly constructed the nation on imperial lines, with the 'army of occupation', as it was called, given the task of subordinating the regions and lower classes to central control in much the same way that Franco, as prewar commander of the Spanish Legion in Morocco, had used his troops to subdue the native tribes.³ The Nationalist military uprising of 1936 that started the Civil War had been triggered in part by the Republic's concessions to strong regionalist sentiment, with the granting of autonomy to Catalonia and, after the war's start, to the Basque Country, seen by the military as a continuation of the earlier loss of empire.⁴ The folkloric musical's insistence on Andalusian locations is more than a displacement of the politically charged regionalisms of north-eastern and north-western Spain onto an area where regionalist sentiment remained largely confined to cultural forms of expression. Much more importantly, Andalusia's exotic associations with the racially alien (its Arab past and gypsy culture) allowed it to serve as the basis of a model of nationhood constructed on colonial lines. In other words, it was precisely Andalusia's 'foreignness' that enabled it to figure 'Spanishness'.

My main aim here is to show that both the missionary film and the folkloric musical, while certainly serving the regime's interests, to varying extents allow resistant readings. It must be remembered that Spanish cinema audiences of the immediate post-Civil War period were anything but homogenous. Despite the Franco regime's overt project of national unification, the savage repression of the 1940s exacerbated divisions. Protectionist legislation promoted a 'national cinema' as part of this unificatory project, but in practice heavy censorship made Spanish audiences adept at the art of resignification.⁵ The missionary films were never popular, but the folkloric musicals (*folklóricas* in Spanish) had a massive following, particularly among the lower classes who were the main victims of postwar repression. This suggests that they allowed forms of audience identification other than those proposed by their orthodox plot resolutions. Richard Dyer has argued that the musical offers a utopian vision whose pleasures, while escapist, point to the dominant culture's lacks. While noting the important role in the film musical of women and blacks, he nevertheless concludes that the genre largely reinforces dominant ideology's denial of gender, race and class as problems.⁶ However, early Francoist discourse explicitly recast class issues in racial terms. The overt treatment of race in Spanish cinema of the period allows a disavowal of class issues, confirming them in the process of denying them. The treatment of race is inseparably linked to that of gender for in both the missionary film and the folkloric musical the racial other is figured as female or as a feminized male. In both cases this leads to a

fetishization of the other whose function is the disavowal of difference. As I hope to show, this disavowal process attempts to manage the threat of racial and sexual otherness by creating a high degree of identification with it. This allows some unorthodox pleasures to spectators belonging to groups categorized as 'other'.

Although Francoist censorship ended the socially committed documentary production of the Spanish Republic,⁷ the racial emphasis of early Francoist ideology led to a flowering of ethnographic shorts celebrating rural culture. These were visually avant garde, using montage and low-angle shots: for example, *Boda en Castilla/Wedding in Castile*, awarded a prize at the 1940 Venice Film Festival, by Augusto García Viñolas who in 1942 became head of the newly founded Francoist newsreel production company, *Noticieros y Documentales (NO-DO)*; or *O carro e o home/The Cart and the Man* by Antonio Román, made in Galician the year before the 1941 Defence of the Language Law banning public use of all minority and foreign languages. As is well known, the Women's Section of the Spanish Fascist Party, *Falange Española*, played a major role in promoting regional song and dance, further reinforcing the figuring of 'other' cultures as female. These early Francoist ethnographic shorts construct the *Volk* as the basis of the nation in a positive and negative sense, exalted by the use of low-angle shots but positioned as subordinate by the use of voiceover.

A similar use of 'voice-of-God' male voiceover is, appropriately, found in the early Francoist missionary film. Ethnography was, of course, invented by the sixteenth-century Spanish friars who went to the 'New World' to convert the natives, and who made them record on paper the same customs they endeavoured to extirpate. The missionary films produced in Spain between 1946 and the early 1950s, during the period of maximum Catholic political influence and with considerable Church financial investment in the Spanish film industry,⁸ explicitly articulate the imperialist rhetoric of early Francoist discourse. These films were made with religious advisers, partly for reasons of ideological control, but also to create ethnographic 'authenticity'. For *La manigua sin Dios/The Godless Swamp* (1947), depicting the eighteenth-century Jesuit missions in Paraguay, the director, Arturo Ruiz-Castillo (a former Republican who had worked with Lorca), obtained information about Guaraní culture from the Deputy Director of the Museum of America. José Luis Sáenz de Heredia's *La mies es mucha/Great is the Harvest* (1949) produces a passable imitation of India thanks to ethnographic information from a member of the Spanish mission in Cuttack and a member of the Spanish Missionary Council (*Consejo Superior de Misiones*). The Catholic source of Sáenz de Heredia's information betrays itself in the demonic slant given to Indian ritual and music, making the priest hero indignantly refer to the Indians as 'Kaffirs'. This orientalist confusion of different others is most marked in Juan de Orduña's *Misión*

7 Republican documentary production intensified during the Civil War, for propaganda purposes. See Ramón Sala Noguera, *El cine en la España republicana durante la Guerra Civil* (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1993). It must be remembered that the Republic banned Buñuel's 1932 documentary *Las Hurdes* for its devastating view of rural deprivation.

8 For Church investment in the Spanish film industry, see Carlos Heredero, *Las huellas del tiempo: cine español 1951-1961* (Valencia: Filmoteca de la Generalitat Valenciana/Filmoteca Española, 1993), pp. 54-8.

Blanca/White Mission (1946), the only one of these films shot on location, in Spanish Guinea. Throughout the film, African extras wander across the screen to create an ethnographic 'look', the women's breasts covered in bra-like contraptions. The two African speaking parts, forming the romance subplot, are played by Spanish actors with bodies blacked: the female has long black hair, a flower behind one ear and a decorous sarong, making her look like a Polynesian; the male is a Tarzan look-alike. In all three of these films, the principal male native is filmed with an oiled naked torso, allowing 1940s Spanish audiences a rare glimpse of flesh, which eroticizes the male body.

The patriarchal orientation of these missionary films, created by the use of male voiceover, is both reinforced and undermined by the emphasis in *Misión blanca* and *La mies es mucha* on homoerotic relations, with literal or figurative father and son framed in closeup with the soft-focus lighting associated with love scenes. In *La mies es mucha* the figurative son is the priest's Indian servant, eventually ordained himself: the priest caresses him like a woman or a child, his head resting in his lap. This double feminization and infantilization of the black 'other' serves to naturalize the surrender of the colonized to white patriarchal domination. In these two films, the principal male native is fetishized through use of the eroticizing camerawork usually reserved for female stars, producing an ambivalent objectification of/identification with the colonized. Both films perfectly illustrate Homi Bhabha's analysis of the ways in which colonial discourse fetishizes the black body in a disavowal (denial/affirmation) of racial difference that produces split identifications. As Bhabha notes, this fetishization is part of a colonial regime of bodily surveillance which, like the cinema, operates through the gaze.⁹

In *La manigua sin Dios*, the split identifications are produced through the fetishization of both male and female native. The Tarzan-figure here is the Guaraní chief who on finding his beloved married to, and pregnant by, a Spanish settler nobly renounces her and defends the Spanish mission against the Viceroy's troops sent to expel the Jesuits from Paraguay. This historical drama is subordinate to the film's twin romance plots. The main plot consists of the interracial marriage between the Spanish settler and his Guaraní bride, illustrating the Spanish imperial myth of the white male generously giving his seed to the native woman to found a new race. A parallel plot relates a young Jesuit's attraction to a native girl who personifies the 'call of the wild'; he resists her sexually, but appropriates her spiritually by baptizing her. In both these romance plots, the colonized culture, figured as female, is constructed as needing to be domesticated and appropriated because of its seductive power. The fact that Spanish imperial discourse propounded miscegenation – in practice, rape – and its religious equivalent, enforced conversion, as a strategy for securing colonial domination, contrary to British segregationist policies, gives a

9 See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66–84. For empire as surveillance, see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).



Publicity for *La manigua sin Dios*, from the film magazine *Cámara*, 15 March 1948.

special inflection to the fetishization of the other. Miscegenation is construed as the incorporation of the female native other into the individual and collective male colonizing body. It is not so much that the colonizer does not identify with the colonized, as in Bhabha's analysis of British colonial discourse, but rather that identification itself serves the double function of denying/affirming racial difference. One can, after all, only incorporate that which is not part of the self. We have here an example of what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'anti-conquest': a strategy of representation 'whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony'.¹⁰ The Spanish colonial advocacy of miscegenation has traditionally allowed Spanish supporters of empire to declare that they are not racist. The claim that the male colonizer 'incorporates' the native female into his body also conveniently reverses the biological fact that he is entering her body,

¹⁰ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7

11 For an analysis of the Spanish fascist emphasis on the incorporation of the female native other via miscegenation, see my article 'Women, Asian hordes and the threat to the self in Ernesto Giménez Caballero's *Genio de España*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, no. 73 (1996), pp. 378–87. Spanish fascist rhetoric was always closer to that of Mussolini than to that of Hitler.

12 Timothy Mitchell, in his excellent book *Flamenco Deep Song* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), demolishes the myth of flamenco's 'pure' 'racial' origins in gypsy culture, stressing its syncretic function as 'underclass bricolage': that is, the cultural expression of an ethnic group constituted by social rather than racial features, including, but not limited to, gypsies.

13 See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 85–92.

14 See Wilton Martinez, 'Who constructs anthropological knowledge? Toward a theory of ethnographic film spectatorship', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 131–61.

disavowing both the white male's fear of engulfment by the female other and his violation of her. It was this emphasis on the incorporation of the female native other that most clearly distinguished the racial orientation of Spanish fascist thought from that of Nazism.¹¹ It is thus logical that identification with the other should be a strategy for disavowing difference in early Francoist cinema. In the missionary film, spectator identifications are generally split. But, as we shall see, in the folkloric musical, whose plots figure a similar fantasy of miscegenation, identification with the exotic other is virtually total.

In two of the above-mentioned missionary films, the colonial miscegenation process is illustrated, if not driven, by folkloric dance and song, providing an explicit link with the contemporaneous folkloric musical genre. In *La manigua sin Dios*, the white settler's marriage to a native bride is celebrated with a syncretic mix of Aragonese *jotas* and Guaraní dance and pan-pipes. In a scene played for laughs in *La mies es mucha*, the Spanish missionary lures the Indians away from the rival Anglican mission when his Indian housekeeper mistakenly puts on a record of flamenco (*sevillanas*) instead of Christmas carols. The point made here is that Spanish popular culture is much more fun than the humourless Anglican hymn-singing tradition. But spectators are also reminded that flamenco, in most of its varieties, is a syncretic mix of Spanish song and dance forms with those brought to Spain in the fifteenth century by gypsy nomads originating from the Indian subcontinent.¹² It is because it is not entirely Spanish that flamenco can figure a colonially conceived Spanishness based on the incorporation of other cultures.

In the early 1950s, when the Franco regime was courting approval from the western democracies who had defeated fascism in World War II, the missionary film dropped its imperialist rhetoric and became concerned with the Church's 'mission' at home to Spain's 'heathen' urban underclasses, explicitly applying colonial structures to mainland Spain. An interesting film here is Luis Lucía's 1952 *Cerca de la ciudad/On the City's Edge*, which – except in the ironic prologue discussed below – replaces omniscient voiceover with the diegetic device of ventriloquism, as the priest protagonist catechizes a group of slum boys with his ventriloquist's dummy. This more subtle way of getting them to internalize his voice foregrounds the mimicry on which Bhabha has shown colonial discourse to depend.¹³ Wilton Martinez has found that closed ethnographic films, such as those with omniscient voiceover, are more likely to produce deviant readings than those which use self-reflexive techniques to make their viewers question what is shown.¹⁴ The prologue to *Cerca de la ciudad* is like a modern self-reflexive ethnographic film, filming the crew shooting a neorealist film, which tracks a priest captured supposedly at random to the shanty town. The comic, mock-newsreel voiceover in this self-reflexive prologue allows the film to have it both ways, undermining 'voice-of-God' omniscient narration while affirming it, in

an enactment of the disavowal process. The ensuing missionary drama, whose outdoor scenes are shot on location, appropriates the techniques of neorealism parodied in the prologue. The threatening difference that is being disavowed here through incorporation is that of early 1950s opposition cinema, which borrowed neorealist techniques from Italy. But, at the same time, the film's neorealist techniques can be seen as a continuation of the ethnographic slant of earlier missionary films, suggesting an awkward overlap between the new opposition cinema and early Francoism's most conservative cinematic genre.

Italian neorealism was an implementation of Gramsci's notion of the 'national-popular', which included the use of folklore to create an organic sense of national community, and in some senses can be seen as an attempt to appropriate for the Left fascism's appeal to national-popular traditions.¹⁵ The folkloric musical had been cultivated under the Spanish Republic of 1931-6 as the basis of a national-popular cinema: there are further uncomfortable parallels between this and the use of the genre under early Francoism as an instrument of nation formation. *Folkloricas* made under the Republic had chiefly used the genre's reliance on lower-class characters to air issues of social injustice. Andalusian settings were popular, in some cases casting class conflict in racial terms through the use of gypsy characters, but in others – for example, *La hija de Juan Simón/The Gravedigger's Daughter* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1935), produced by Buñuel – treating it purely as a class problem. Aragonese locations, which did not allow class issues to be recast in racial terms, were also used. Even *Nobleza baturra/Aragonese Peasant Nobility*, made by Florián Rey in 1935 for the conservative production company Cifesa, proclaims its heroine's right to marry a landless peasant, while his *Morena Clara* (1936), also for Cifesa, is an overt denunciation of anti-gypsy prejudice. However, the radical potential of these prewar *folkloricas* is undercut by their melodramatic concentration on the victim's point of view, which tends to produce a cathartic exaltation of suffering virtually indistinguishable from that propounded in the folkloric musicals of the early Francoist period.

Indeed, the best-known prewar director of *folkloricas*, Florián Rey, accepted an invitation to make German-Spanish coproductions in Nazi Berlin in 1938-9, as did another Spanish director Benito Perojo, who in 1939-40 went on to make Italian-Spanish coproductions at Cinecittà. All of the films made in fascist Berlin and Rome by these directors were folkloric musicals, although those of Perojo were mostly slick urban comedies with a strong picaresque flavour. Rey was invited to Berlin because his wife and lead singer, Imperio Argentina, was one of Hitler's favourite actresses: Hitler told her he had seen her twenty-four times in Rey's *Nobleza baturra*.¹⁶ The appeal to Hitler of this melodrama of rural innocence slandered and rewarded makes clear the link between the *folklorica* and the Nazi exaltation of

15 See Marcia Landy, *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 154-84. The links between ethnographic film and neorealism are noted by David MacDougall in Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (eds), *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology and Photography* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 233, 248.

16 Both Imperio Argentina and the star of Perojo's musicals, Estrellita Castro, were given private audiences by Hitler; Estrellita Castro was also received by Mussolini. See Daniel Pineda Novo, *Las folkloricas y el cine* (Huelva: Festival de Cine Iberoamericano, 1991), pp. 52, 65-6; Terenci Moix, *Suspiros de España* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1993), p. 74.

the *Volk*. It also makes clear the genre's debt to foreign views of Spain as Europe's exotic other. The first film made in Berlin by Rey was a version of Mérimée's and Bizet's *Carmen* – *Carmen la de Triana* (1938) – despite Goebbels's misgivings about its gypsy heroine. Given the Nazi emphasis on eliminating racial others, it is interesting that the film does not end, as in Mérimée's and Bizet's versions, with Don José killing Carmen, but with her redemption, true to the Spanish fascist (and Catholic) emphasis on incorporating the other. The first film made in Berlin by Perojo was, likewise, a version of Beaumarchais's and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. The Franco regime encouraged the export of Spanish films to Spanish America, particularly Mexico and Argentina which had large film industries, as a way of compensating for the loss of empire by continuing to exert cultural hegemony (*hispanidad*). The most exportable commodity was the *folklórica*, catering to foreign stereotypes of 'Spanishness'.¹⁷ It was

17 Many of these musicals depict an Andalusian singer or bullfighter triumphing in Mexico, Cuba or Argentina; others conversely use Mexican or Argentine stars (often of Spanish origin) playing Mexicans or Argentines returning to the 'homeland'.



Poster for *Carmen la de Triana*, made in Nazi Berlin by the Spanish-German production company, Hispano-Film-Produktion.

to break into the Spanish–American market that the German–Spanish coproduction company Hispano-Film-Produktion was set up in Berlin in 1937 in the first place. Several articles in early issues of the Falangist film magazine *Primer Plano* (founded in 1940) expressed concern about this mimicry of foreign images of Spanishness.

The second film made by Rey in Berlin, *La canción de Aixa/Aixa's Song* (1939), again starring Imperio Argentina, was an orientalist fantasia set in Spanish Morocco, showing that the cultivation of the image of Spain as the West's oriental other was linked for Spain, and no doubt also for Germany, to dreams of colonial expansion in North Africa. The film's complex dramatization of the superiority of Arab to European values problematizes the depiction of 'Spanishness', traditionally seen as not-quite-European but not-quite-Arab either: an ambivalence compounded by Francoist discourse's assertion of a model of national identity that was western in as much as it was Catholic, but nonwestern in as much as it rejected democracy and capitalist modernity. Bhabha notes that the mimicry fundamental to colonial discourse construes difference as 'almost the same but not quite': the heroine of this film is a performer (mimic) of mixed race.¹⁸ The romance plot here figures not the usual conquest of the native female by the white male, but the conquest of the mixed-race female (a cabaret singer who performs orientalist extravaganzas in a westernized cultural setting) by the native male (a prince, who rejects Europeanization, including western attitudes to marriage, contrasting with his decadent Europeanized cousin with whom Imperio Argentina is initially in love). Arab values here figure an extreme version of the patriarchal ethos propounded by early Francoism, but its exaltation requires spectators to identify with Arab culture and to reject European modernity represented in the film precisely by Spanish or Spanish-influenced characters. The film's critique of western decadence works against its depiction of colonial relations. The Arab prince who finally wins Imperio Argentina's heart, after her initially loveless arranged marriage to him, rejects the supposed Arab code of male violence upheld by his decadent cousin because he has learnt the value of self-restraint from serving in the Spanish colonial army. In practice, this attempt to salvage Spanish colonial superiority leads to identification with a feminized, passive patriarch, who refuses to act when goaded. The function of the film's musical extravaganzas, as Imperio Argentina moves from orientalist spectacles mounted on a westernized cabaret stage to equally orientalist spectacles naturalized by their integration into the narrative's depiction of Arab palace life, is to make us identify with the Arab and feminine other. For Imperio Argentina, this means a rejection of her paternal European (Spanish) inheritance in favour of her maternal Arab roots. The split identifications figured by Imperio Argentina's mixed-race role thus give way to total identification with the other, albeit an other represented from a western orientalist perspective.

¹⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 89.

Imperio Argentina also plays a mixed-race heroine in a later folkloric musical made in Spain and set in colonial Cuba, *Bambú* (Sáenz de Heredia, 1945), explicitly linking the genre to an imperial model of nationhood. The Spanish protagonist is an unsuccessful avant-garde composer who dies in the war against Cuban independence fighters. In his dying moments, he composes his masterpiece as a syncretic amalgam of the classical tradition and Afro-Caribbean dance and song, personified by Imperio Argentina playing a mulatto Cuban singer who dies with him in a *Liebestod*. The male European classical tradition perpetuates itself through this musical miscegenation, but at the same time, Afro-Caribbean carnival, figured by a female, reveals the lack of vitality of European high culture. A large number of 1940s *folklóricas* dramatize the superior oral immediacy and authenticity of folksong, represented mainly by the female voice, by comparison with male written culture. In the syncretic musical climax to *Bambú*, the fetishization of Imperio Argentina's mixed-race character figures the split identifications of the disavowal process as her difference is negated by her white, western dress but maintained by her exotic exuberance and entourage of mulatto dancers and musicians.

The vast majority of early Francoist *folklóricas* dramatize a fantasy of miscegenation through the surrender of the low-class, usually gypsy, female singing lead to the higher-class, white male hero. Many are set in the mid nineteenth century at a time when the central State was extending its control over the regions, as the Francoist State was in the 1940s. The political subtext of the need for national unification is represented by the stock plot of the female gypsy singer, brought up by bandits, falling for an army officer. There is a clear parallel in these films between the bandits, who defy the army's attempts to bring the countryside under central State control, and the rural guerrilla fighters who defied the Francoist army from the end of the Civil War until 1951, and who were referred to as 'bandits' in the notorious Banditry and Terrorism Decree of 1943. Bandits and gypsies were not the same thing, but had always been associated in Spanish law: the paramilitary Civil Guard set up in 1844 to bring the regions under central control was explicitly charged with suppressing bandits and policing gypsies. Florián Rey's Berlin-made *Carmen la de Triana* stresses its gypsy heroine's links with banditry and makes her finally acknowledge the superior 'gentlemanliness' of the military, represented by her lover Don José who dies in a suicidal act of heroism that saves the military from being blown up by the bandits. In *Estrella de Sierra Morena* (Ramón Torrado, 1952), the heroine, brought up by bandits, turns out to be the daughter of the provincial governor responsible for eradicating banditry, thus making possible her marriage to an army officer. This scenario is reversed in *La duquesa de Benamejil/The Duchess of Benamejil* (Luis Lucía, 1949), whose male bandit singing lead wins the heart of a duchess and

triumphs over the foppish, double-dealing representatives of the law: the political identifications here are entirely unorthodox. Those *folklóricas* with a modern setting mostly hinge on the love for a female gypsy singer of an upper-class landowner. A less frequent plot is the female gypsy's refusal of wealthy suitors for her same-race lover, usually endowed with fame and fortune as a bullfighter, thus integrating male as well as female others into high society.

The extreme fetishization in these films of the female star, whose name routinely appears in the credits before the title, leads to almost total audience identification with the other. In many cases, the role of male protagonist is played by a virtually unknown actor: even when there is a big-name male star, he is matched by a female lead who is at least equally charismatic. This overwhelming preference for female singing and/or dancing leads produces a re-gendering of flamenco which, according to Timothy Mitchell's evidence, was a male-oriented performance art, with largely male stars singing and dancing for male, landowning playboy patrons.¹⁹ In the few films that have a male singing lead, he occupies the position of outcast, again producing audience identification with the other. This identification with the usually female other is increased by her ability, through her singing and verbal wit, to voice the emotions repressed by her higher-class male suitor, and by the vitality of her performance as a dancer which contrasts with the higher-class hero's stiffness. Indeed, one of the genre's inherent flaws is the difficulty of understanding why its quick-witted, spirited heroines should fall for such wooden, if conventionally good-looking, suitors. The plot is not that of the seduction of the female by the male protagonist but the reverse, and it is without exception narrated from the seducing female protagonist's point of view. The audience is thus seduced by the female protagonist not because it sees her through the desiring male's gaze, but because it identifies with her position as seductress. And these seductive females – even in Imperio Argentina's rendering of Carmen – are always charming, not threatening. It could be argued that this intense, positive identification with the other-race heroine constructs spectators of both sexes as female. In the process, they are also constructed as belonging to a social outgroup – one represented as infinitely more attractive than the stiff, repressed dominant classes. (At the level of minor characters, the bandits – apart from the exceptional traitor who proves the rule – are always much more 'human' than the military.) This idealization of 'the people' is, of course, a form of demagoguery. But the cost is near-complete audience identification with the seductive lower-class female protagonist played always by a big-name star.

In several films, the Pygmalion theme of the attempt by a higher-class, educated male to turn a female gypsy singer into a 'lady' is reversed as she sets about 'melting' his educated restraint, teaching

19 See Mitchell, *Flamenco Deep Song*.

him the superiority of 'natural spontaneity'. In *Canelita en rama* (García Maroto, 1942), the upper-class landowner's son re-educated (or de-educated) by the gypsy heroine has been to university at Oxford; the spontaneous female gypsy thus represents a positive Spanishness which the upper-class white male has lost and needs to recover. This is, however, complicated by the fact that her natural spontaneity also makes her largely impervious to the convent boarding school in northern Spain to which she is sent to be turned into a lady. A similar re-education or de-education of the male by the female also occurs in the one postwar Aragonese *folklórica*, *La Dolores* (Florián Rey, 1939), whose peasant heroine (Conchita Piquer) falls for an inhibited student. The same plot structure operates here even though the heroine is not other race, since the racial conflict dramatized in the vast majority of *folklóricas* is a way of treating class problems while seeming not to. Significantly, after 1939 there are, to my knowledge, no more Aragonese *folklóricas*: the genre becomes exclusively Andalusian for the rest of the postwar period, replacing the class emphasis which the genre had inherited from the Republic by a racial focus.

Although the audience identifies with the female star's superior ability to express emotion, it also identifies with the suffering expressed in her song which voices her awareness of the racial and social inferiority that makes her unworthy of her higher-class suitor's love or leads him to treat her cruelly. Mitchell brilliantly describes flamenco as a psychodrama, enacted by members of the urban underclasses (called 'gypsies' but not necessarily of gypsy stock) for their landowning playboy patrons, which provides cathartic release for dependency anxiety. One reason for the massive popularity of the *folklóricas* in early Francoist Spain is, no doubt, that it allowed the victims of Francoist repression a cathartic release from their own relations of dependency, while allowing members of the establishment the illusion of 'loving' (literally 'patronizing') the lower classes. But Mitchell notes that this culture of dependency, though based on collusion, offered the underclasses strategies for manipulating their patrons. A constituent feature of the *folklórica* genre is the gypsy heroine's ability to disarm, and turn the tables on, those who regard her as racially and socially inferior; in *Estrella de Sierra Morena* (Ramón Torrado, 1952), Lola Flores wreaks massive havoc on polite society, tricking even the army officer she loves. Many films hinge on their gypsy heroine giving the upper-class landowner who has abused her his comeuppance; in *Filigrana* (Luis Marquina, 1949), Conchita Piquer, having become a successful performance artist and millionaire's widow, buys up the mansion of her erstwhile aristocratic seducer and throws him out on the street. This racial and class revenge is also a revenge by women on men. There is clearly an element of carnivalesque reversal here, allowing class, racial and gender inferiors their moment of cathartic release, even if the films' endings reimpose



Poster for *Estrella de Sierra Morena*, showing Lola Flores at her aggressive best.

hierarchy. Robert Stam, relating carnival to the musical comedy, has noted that the laughter it provokes appeals both to elitists who, like Nietzsche, seek a moment of transcendental release from the constraints of the ego, and to those who, like Bakhtin, revel in collective, popular cultural forms.²⁰ The stars of the *folklóricas* are characterized not only by their ability to voice suffering but also by their *alegría* (gaiety), as the dialogue insistently comments. This *alegría* can be seen not as the mindless escapism for which later Spanish filmmakers and critics have condemned the genre, but as a carnivalesque enactment of utopian pleasure. Needless to say, only those spectators who value popular culture will appreciate the subversive potential of the fun. Indeed, those who have attempted to

²⁰ Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 92–3.

give flamenco the aura of high art, and who have also privileged male performers, have consistently stressed its tragic side, overlooking the fact that much of it is concerned with pleasure.

Mitchell criticizes the 1920s intellectuals (Lorca and Falla) who attempted to turn flamenco into an elitist preserve by seeing it as an example of ethnically pure artistic primitivism, when in fact it developed in the nineteenth century as an offshoot of modernization, the product of a new urban subculture linked to alcohol and prostitution, dependent on landowning playboy patrons (*señoritos*) who had also left the land for the cities. Mitchell notes that the flamenco revival by 1950s Francoist intellectuals, who again attempted to fossilize it as an ethnically pure art form for the exclusive consumption of male connoisseurs, owed itself to the fact that Franco's victory in the Civil War had 'made Spain safe' for *señoritos*.²¹ The founder of the Spanish fascist party, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, was just such an Andalusian *señorito*. His relative, José María Pemán, also from Cadiz, headed the Nationalist Purification Committee (Comisión Depuradora) which purged teachers and cultural workers; several postwar *folklóricas* were based on his scripts or plays, showing that the genre's cult of the popular and of the feminine as an expression of emotion was the other side of the regime's anti-intellectualism. In one of these films, *Lola la piconera* (Luis Lucía, 1951),²² the rural gypsy fantasia metamorphoses at its climactic moment into ballet, revealing the elitism behind this purist cult of the folk. As Mitchell points out, such intellectual fantasies of flamenco as a 'pure', 'natural' art form were based on a fear of modern mass culture, where flamenco was thriving and adapting itself to modernity in various hybrid forms, with no need for intellectuals to rescue it.

Film, however, is part of modern mass culture. It could be said that the folkloric musical gives a more accurate picture of flamenco than that created by purist intellectuals, not only because it shows it to be a pleasure-giving as well as a tragic medium, but also precisely because of its staginess and its frequent use of performance-artist protagonists hovering on the edge of prostitution and seduced by not-always-model *señoritos*. In practice, most *folklóricas* combine this staginess with a purist but mythical depiction of flamenco as the authentic, natural product of rural community. *Canelita en rama* (1942), whose director Eduardo García Maroto had started his career as a documentary filmmaker, sets its plot against ethnographic shots of the grape harvest; Ramón Torrado's *La niña de la venta/The Girl at the Tavern* (1951) gives us a documentary survey of tuna fishing, and alternates its depiction of flamenco performances at the tavern with shots of the spontaneous dancing at the gypsy camp, filmed like an ethnographic travelogue. The same mixture of staged and natural performance characterizes Edgar Neville's stunning 1952 documentary film, *Duende y misterio del flamenco/The Spirit and Mystery of Flamenco*,

²¹ Mitchell, *Flamenco Deep Song*, p. 179.

²² Based on Pemán's play *Las Cortes de Cádiz*. Pemán wrote some of the dialogue for Lucía's 1949 *La duquesa de Benamejil*, based on the verse drama by Antonio and Manuel Machado, and coauthored the synopsis for *Brindis a Manolete* (Florián Rey, 1948). He also coauthored the screenplay for a biopic of St Ignatius of Loyola, *El capitán de Loyola* (José Díaz Morales, 1948).

where professional dancers alternate with gypsies whose genuineness, the male voiceover tells us, is guaranteed by the fact that they are 'not photogenic'.

Even in those films with ethnographic pretensions, the emphasis on performance and the use of stereotyped mise-en-scene (including mirrors) leads to an often explicit self-reflexivity. Bruce Babington and Peter Evans have noted that the musical's staginess makes it an inherently self-reflexive genre.²³ The same Lucía who introduced a self-reflexive dimension into the missionary film with *Cerca de la ciudad*, in 1950 produced a pastiche *folklórica* with his French-Spanish coproduction *El sueño de Andalucía/Dream of Andalusia*, based on a French operetta and exploiting foreign stereotypes of Spanishness for comic effect. In another self-reflexive prologue, the film starts with its male singing lead Luis Mariano, an exile who had made his name in operetta in France, reading the screenplay in Paris. As he reads out the stereotypical description of the Andalusian rural mise-en-scene – 'framed by cacti', and so on – the opening scenes of the film-within-the-film appear on screen to his voiceover, which gradually fades out. At the climactic moment, the hero poised to triumph in Seville's bullring, the camera draws back to reveal the crew filming the scene in the Paris studio. The filming over, the actors set off for Seville to see the 'real thing', with a parodic newsreel voiceover announcing as they tour the city, 'This is the Giralda. Its main function is to appear in almost every Spanish film', until we enter a studio set used earlier where the film's female star Carmen Sevilla appears at the window and the film-within-the-film threatens to start up again. Many *folklóricas* blur the distinction between songs sung as part of a stage performance interrupting the narrative, and songs which further the narrative as monologue, dialogue or commentary: in *El sueño de Andalucía*, the blurring is such that everything becomes a self-conscious performance. Richard Dyer has proposed that the most subversive musicals are those which dissolve the distinction between musical numbers as escape and narrative as problems, for in such films 'the world of the narrative is also (already) utopian'.²⁴

Terenci Moix has told how contemporary Spanish male spectators of Luis Mariano's films would shout *maricón* (fairy), because his self-conscious acting style was seen by them as effeminate.²⁵ *El sueño de Andalucía*, and Lucía's similarly self-reflexive *La duquesa de Benamejí* where the characters comment in verse dialogue on the ballad they are enacting, are rare examples of *folklóricas* with male singing leads (Jorge Mistral in the latter case). These male stars are feminized by being cast in the role of seductive others endowed with the ability to voice emotion. Although, unlike the female stars of the *folklórica*, they are not dancers as well as singers, their free body movements contrast with the generally stiff male deportment. Gaylyn Studlar has analysed the subversive potential of 1920s female

²³ See Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 5, 56, 162, 169.

²⁴ Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', p. 279.

²⁵ See Moix, *Suspiros de España*, p. 198.

²⁶ In Devereaux and Hillman (eds), *Fields of Vision*, pp. 161–80.

²⁷ See Moix, *Suspiros de España*.

²⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 85–92.

²⁹ Lola Flores, however, came to so identify with her film role as gypsy singer and dancer that throughout her life she donated money to help gypsies in distress. This real-life assumption of her screen role of racial other permitted her a sexual licence that would not have been tolerated in an actress whose screen image was white.

³⁰ My thanks here to Corin Willis, and to those participating in the discussion on his paper 'The minstrel's last days: an explanation and analysis of the continued use of "blackface" in 1930s Hollywood' and on an earlier version of this paper given at the *Screen Studies Conference* (Glasgow, June 1996), for drawing my attention to this parallel.

spectators' attraction to the feminized heroes of the silent screen;²⁶ the popularity with female spectators of Luis Mariano and Jorge Mistral (the latter went on to become a star in Mexico) no doubt functioned in a similar way. But they are feminine men acting out stereotypical *macho* roles, just as the female stars – equally popular with contemporary female audiences – perform stereotypical feminine roles with a swashbuckling gusto. The genre's explicit or implicit self-reflexivity subverts both masculine and feminine stereotypes by exposing them as a form of mimicry. The early Francoist *folklórica* has in recent years enjoyed a revival with Spanish gay audiences, because of its camp exposure of the constructedness of gender roles.²⁷ Self-reflexivity does not necessarily involve a critical stance; mimicry, as Bhabha has shown, can be used as a strategy by the culturally colonized but its forms are imposed.²⁸ The sometimes notable moments of class, racial and gender reversal in these folkloric musicals should not blind one to their basically conservative plots. But their staginess at least makes the viewer aware that the fantasies of miscegenation being enacted on screen are just that: fantasies. And by forcing spectators, male and female, to identify with the point of view of a feminine other, acted by male as well as female stars, they undermine the patriarchal emphasis of prevailing Francoist discourse, showing, in the process, that gender roles are performed rather than determined by biological sex.

It is also worth noting that the stars, female and male, who played the role of racial other in these *folklóricas* were not, as Spanish audiences well knew, gypsies (or, in *La canción de Aixa* and *Bambú*, mixed-race Moroccans or Cubans).²⁹ A parallel can be drawn with Hollywood blackface musical comedy, which allows a disavowal of racial difference by making it clear that the otherness represented is only cosmetic.³⁰ It has been pointed out that the ambivalent fetishization of the flamenco singer in Spanish cultural discourse echoes that of the jazz singer in the USA, so often mimicked in blackface. If, in the missionary film, the native characters (apart from the extras in *Misión blanca*) are played in literal blackface by Spanish actors, in the folkloric musical the other-race roles are mimicked by familiar Spanish stars in a kind of 'whiteface'. In some cases, even the Spanishness of these stars was open to question. As we have seen, Luis Mariano was brought up and made his career in France. Imperio Argentina's father was English and she first triumphed as a child star in Buenos Aires (hence her last name), later working in Paramount's Paris-based Joinville studios with (among others) Maurice Chevalier and Carlos Gardel. In the German version of *Carmen la de Triana*, the 'typically Spanish' characters were played by German actors, with the multilingual Imperio Argentina acting in German. The folkloric musicals made by Perojo at Cinecittà mixed Spanish and Italian actors. It is unlikely that this lack of concern with authenticity was a deliberate strategy to subvert the racial discourse of early Francoism.

But the effect is to represent race as a form of mimicry, rather than as an inherent, biological category, and to permit identification with the fetishized images of racial otherness on the screen.

Michael Rogin has argued that Hollywood blackface, producing a split identification with a 'not quite other', allowed US audiences to come to terms with the white Jewish immigrants who played mostly blackface roles. The fetishization in early Francoist cinema of other-race characters similarly uses race as a way of working through problems of class and gender whose existence was officially denied. As in Rogin's analysis of blackface, the emotional freedom of the racial other, associated with premodern pastoral, is appropriated by white actors for white audiences, leaving actual racial others literally and figuratively out of the picture. While noting important differences, Rogin draws suggestive parallels between the blackface minstrelsy tradition in nineteenth-century US popular theatre which allowed white, mainly Irish, working-class immigrants to construct a national identity for themselves while excluding African-Americans, and the exaltation of the *Volk* as the basis of nationhood by nineteenth-century European intellectuals who invented popular cultural traditions for their own purposes. Rogin notes that the fetishization of the cultural other in blackface is a form of disavowal.³¹ Like Hollywood blackface minstrels, the other-race singing leads of early Francoist folkloric musicals are not enacting problems experienced by, or even associated with, gypsies or mixed-race Cubans or Moroccans, but disavowing problems of white society. Disavowal, however, is a dangerous double game. The use of white stars to play other-race roles ensured that Spanish audiences' identifications remained safely white. But it also facilitated identification with early Francoism's others. No doubt the intention was to encourage spectators, of both sexes, to internalize the other-race heroine's surrender to dominant patriarchal culture. The use of feminized other-race heroes was presumably a converse attempt to give *machismo* a seductive face. In practice, however, spectators find themselves identifying with gender, racial and class others who, as the embodiment of dominant culture's lacks, are desired and courted by it. For those who ascribed to the repressive values of Francoism, this must have offered a temporary release from moral puritanism. For those who were Francoism's unwilling victims, the spectacle on screen of stiff, repressed *señoritos* succumbing to the charms of quick-witted, resourceful, hard-to-get other-race heroines, or that of lithe, expressive other-race heroes outshining or seducing their social superiors, must have provided a vicarious form of cultural revenge.

³¹ My thanks to the Filmoteca Española, Madrid for enabling me to see many of the films discussed.

³¹ Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), chs 1–3 in particular. Male gypsies in the *folklorica* correspond to the blackface representation of male African-Americans as workshy and recalcitrant in the face of the capitalist work ethic. However, blackface is largely male centred while the *folklorica* is massively woman centred.

Steel in the gaze: on POV and the discourse of vision in Kathryn Bigelow's cinema

LAURA RASCAROLI

To see is a dangerous act.

Jean Starobinski

For him, it's about seeing himself through other people's eyes.

Faith, *Strange Days*

Kathryn Bigelow's cinema is essentially a discourse on vision. Her first film, the short *Set Up* (1979), shows one young man beating up another in a street for several minutes, while shouting at him. The scene is repeated. The second time, the screen is divided into two parts; on both sides we are shown exactly the same scene, except that on the right-hand side the images are in closeup. As the scene runs, two male voiceovers conduct a philosophical discussion on violence, sexuality and fascism. This short is indicative of Bigelow's interest in the image and its possibility of conveying meanings, in particular in relation to violence – or more accurately, as we shall see, to being in mortal danger. But Bigelow's interest in the question of vision dates back even to her pre-cinematographic work. 'I was an abstract expressionist', Bigelow once said in an interview. 'My paintings definitely reflected a sense of light, but they were dark and frenzied.'¹

Vision is, of course, basically a question of light and darkness, not only in painting but also in everyday perceptive experience. In the heightened cinematic experience the ray of light rips the darkness of

¹ Kathryn Bigelow, interview in *American Film*, vol. 14, no. 10 (1989), p. 59.

the auditorium. It is not surprising, then, that Bigelow's description of her paintings also perfectly defines her films: a sense of light reflected by darkness, combined with a frantic movement. The contrast between light and darkness and the passage from day to night is often important in her films, particularly, for instance, in *Near Dark* (1987). A basic component of any vampire story, this contrast has rarely been as plastically represented as in Bigelow's film. Consider the scene in which the vampires hide in the darkness of a motel room and swords of daylight literally burst into the room through the holes punctured in the wooden walls by police bullets.

Blue Steel (1990) similarly contains many scenes which reflect Bigelow's description of her paintings: rays of blue light cut from the side into the blue darkness of the police station; the gun used by Megan (Jamie Lee Curtis) reflects blue glints; Eugene (Ron Silver) claims that a 'brightness' came to tear his darkness.

'Frenzied' is the second adjective used by Bigelow to describe her paintings, a description which applies equally well to many aspects of her cinema. Not only does Bigelow often edit at an incredible speed and direct frantic scenes, she also uses her camera in a very dynamic way. In *Point Break* (1991), Johnny Utah (Keanu Reeves) chases Bodhi (Patrick Swayze) through a long series of fancy gardens, sitting rooms, swimming pools and glass sliding doors.² During the chase, the camera never loses contact with Reeves's back, giving the spectator the impression of running behind the two characters, of being part of the scene. Four years later, Bigelow's camera no longer runs behind the characters: her camera *is* the running character. In the powerful opening scene of *Strange Days* (1995), in fact, the camera 'becomes' the squid, a machine worn by a fleeing robber on his head, under some nylon tights. The squid's sensors record everything that the wearer perceives and feels on a diskette. This can afterwards be played back by a 'spectator', who will be able to relive at all levels the recorded adventure.

How did Bigelow render the squid's vision? As James Cameron describes it in his screenplay, 'it starts with a burst of bright white static exploding across the darkness'.³ Then, hand-held camera, no cuts, and images rigorously in POV.

Let us consider another opening scene, that of *Blue Steel*. The screen is completely dark and we hear the terrified cries of a woman and the aggressive voice of a man. Light. A corridor stretches in front of us. The hand-held camera advances slowly and unsteadily towards the voices, giving us the impression of a (scared) human vision. Soon the main character, a policewoman, steps into the frame, becoming part of the same vision.

Both *Strange Days* and *Blue Steel* begin with a subjective camera. Nothing to prepare us, nothing to forewarn us: we are immediately inside the narrative, perceptively and emotionally tied to the destiny of a character who is moving towards a mortal danger. In these two

2 I owe this example to the review of *Point Break* by Leonardo Gandini, which appeared in *Cineforum*, no. 310 (1992), pp. 81-3.

3 James Cameron, *Strange Days* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 1.

4 Christian Metz discusses the POV in the chapter on subjective images and sounds in his recent *L'Énonciation impersonnelle, ou le site du film* (Paris: Meridiens Klincksieck, 1991).

5 Jean Mitry discusses the semi-subjective shot in *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma-II: Les formes* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1965), pp. 61–79, 138–40.

6 Marc Vernet, *Figures de l'absence* (Paris: Edition Cahiers du Cinéma, 1988).

7 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: a Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 133.

opening scenes, we share not only the angle, but also the modality of the characters' vision and, therefore, their feelings of fear and anxiety.

But the images with which *Blue Steel* opens are not a canonical POV. The classical subjective shot, in fact, is formed by a sequence of two or three shots which show first a character who is looking, and then the object of the character's gaze. In this context, Christian Metz remarks that to be able to enter the look subjectively we must objectively know the person who looks.⁴ *Blue Steel* begins with what we may call a semi-subjective shot. At first the camera's eye subjectively coincides with the character's gaze, as in the POV, but then these premisses are subverted and the character's body ends up by being included as the object of the same vision. I am not using the term 'semi-subjective shot' in the Mitry and Metz sense, whereby they consider semi-subjective any shot which is objective in the complex, but which is associated with the vision of a character.⁵ An example of this would be a shot in which the camera is placed behind a character and shows at the same time the character and the scene at which the character is looking. I refer instead to the type of shots which I described above: those which start as a canonical POV, but then include the character's body in her/his own act of viewing. While, as Metz points out, the first type of semi-subjective shot is very common in fiction cinema, the second type is much rarer.

According to Marc Vernet, each subjective shot is one of those 'figures of absence', those blind points which in his opinion mark the filmic representation.⁶ Vernet thinks that the character, by becoming the source of vision, seems to condition the whole representation, while in reality she/he disappears offscreen, becoming invisible to the spectator.

Far from being a figure of absence or a hole in the representation, the subjective shot, *mutatis mutandis*, cinematographically replicates the human experience of perception. The embodied viewer, in fact, is never visible in the act of viewing she/he generates, unless seen through a reflection. At the same time, though, 'our whole being as embodied informs what we see and makes us present to the visible even as the visible appears as present to us', as Vivian Sobchack suggests in her *The Address of the Eye*.⁷ Clearly, in the subjective shot the 'real' viewer is not the character, but the film's body – with the camera as its perceptive organ. Nevertheless, the eye of the camera, those of the character and even those of the spectator are superimposed in the POV to produce an intentional gaze which is actually charged with a triple presence: that of the film's body, that of the character's body, and finally that of the spectator's body.

In the semi-subjective shot, on the other hand, the body of the character, after having been the invisible viewer, the subject of the vision, finally becomes the visible viewed, the object of the same vision. This paradox clearly causes a shock in the spectator's cognition, a shock which has normally been interpreted as a 'waking

up'. It is not possible to see and be seen at the same time, therefore I am not watching a piece of reality, but a film.

I believe that the surprise caused by the semi-subjective shot must be read otherwise. I consider it useful to begin by summing up Deleuze's position on what he refers to as semi-subjectivity. In his discussion on perception-image, developing an idea of Mitry's, he suggests that, because of the constant movement of the cinematographic perception-image from the subjective to the objective and vice versa, we should consider semi-subjectivity as the normal cinematographic shot, ascribing to it 'a specific, diffuse, supple status, which may remain imperceptible, but which sometimes reveals itself in certain striking cases'.⁸ Deleuze then looks for a status for this semi-subjectivity, since he believes that it has no equivalent in natural perception.

I wish, on the contrary, to suggest that an equivalent may be found in the viewing experience as described in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. This is based on the idea that perception takes place precisely in the indistinguishability of perceiving and being perceived, of activity and passivity, and in the reversibility of seeing and being seen. What becomes patent in the semi-subjective shot is actually that each viewing subject is always also a viewed object; or better, that, as Sobchack puts it, since 'every lived body is both the subject of perception and expression and an object for perception and expression, every lived body lives the commutation of perception and expression in a simultaneously subjective and objective modality'.⁹ The semi-subjective shot reminds us of this. It is also the central idea in Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys*, a film which may be easily compared to Bigelow's *Strange Days*, these being the two big US science-fiction movies of 1996, and the work of two 'visionary' directors, both of whom are on the border between Hollywood and auteurism.

In *Twelve Monkeys*, Cole (Bruce Willis) is a man from the future (the present?) sent by means of a time machine to the present (the past?) to collect information about the origins of a virus which almost wiped out the world's population in 1996 and 1997. He has a recurrent dream in which he is a child in an airport who sees a man being shot dead before his eyes. This enigmatic, repeated scene finds an explanation at the end (the beginning?) of the film, when we spectators realize that Cole is not only the child, but also the man who is killed before the child's eyes – his own eyes.

This sequence clearly talks about the vertigo of the simultaneity of seeing and being seen. In his dream, in fact, Cole is actor and spectator at the same time: he watches himself as the child watching himself as the adult who is shot dead. Furthermore, thanks to the subjective camera, we the spectators see through the child's eyes and, as a result, we tend to momentarily identify with the child himself. Thus the man we see being killed is also partly ourselves. Perception,

8 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 71.

9 Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 41.

then, not only locates us, but also displaces us – and it is precisely this vertigo which undermines the whole narrative chronology of *Twelve Monkeys*.

The relevance of this scene to my discussion on vision in Bigelow's cinema is stronger than it may seem. *Twelve Monkeys*, taking as its source Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (Fr., 1962), is actually less a science-fiction movie than a film on vision and memory, or, more specifically, on visual memory. Going back in time means, after all, to see ourselves, to gaze upon ourselves. What *Twelve Monkeys* tells us is that when we look back we see ourselves dying – over and over again.

The discourse of *Strange Days* is very similar. Here the memory is supported by machinery, the squid, which is not very different from Gilliam's time machine. Lenny (Ralph Fiennes) in fact uses the squid to remember, that is to go back in time, in order to relive his past with Faith (Juliette Lewis). His clients use the squid to relive memories of other people. This mnestic research leads in a specific direction: the ultimate experience (the 'snuff') of the squid's visual memory is to live one's own death, over and over again. In *Strange Days*' distressing opening sequence, thanks to the rigorous POV, we are tied to the criminal who, trying to escape the police, runs across the roof of the Thai restaurant he has just robbed. We the spectators are excited, we suffer, are scared, but we cannot stop watching. There is a building in front of us. We jump, we miss, we fall. Black. We have died.

Later in the film somebody lets Lenny have a diskette on which a dreadful act of violence is recorded. This time we are tied to a man who attacks a woman in her apartment. He immobilizes her and places on her head a playback squid machine, which is connected to the squid he wears on his head. From that moment, she can see and feel exactly what he sees and feels. We spectators are tied, through the POV, to both the woman and the man (and to Lenny, who is 'watching' the diskette for us). We are at once both the viewing subject and the viewed object. We rape and are raped, we kill and are killed. The act of violence is happening now, before our eyes, but it has also already happened. It is a memory. The pain and panic (of the woman, of Lenny as a spectator and of us as the real spectators) mix with the pleasure (of the rapist). He/she/we see her/our own death. We are horrified.

As Cameron writes in his screenplay, after the murder, 'The killer's hands form a frame with thumbs and forefingers . . . he is framing her face with his hands like a director lining up a closeup. He leans very close to her and stares into one dead eye, the pupil wide, seeing nothing.'¹⁰

It is clear by now that these films are talking about cinema: cinema as the time machine that allows us to watch ourselves watching ourselves; Cinema as the squid, the machine of the visual memory that

¹⁰ Cameron, *Strange Days*, p. 100.

records pieces of life – and death – and gives us the opportunity to relive them; finally, as we shall see, cinema as the visual apparatus through which we try to extend the scope and capacity of our gaze.

All Bigelow's cinema, in fact, talks about testing the human physical boundaries and, ultimately, about the search for self-identity. This search is lead mainly through the sense of sight and uses both unmediated perception (the character's eyes/the human body) and an instrument-mediated perception (the camera's eye/the film's body).¹¹ Of course this distinction is false. Cinema is always an instrument-mediated perception, since it is impossible to see a cinema not mediated by cinema. As perhaps it is impossible by now to see a reality that is not filmic. But Bigelow works towards a reduction of the distance between the human eye and the camera's eye, towards a more and more 'transparent' cinema, towards a transcendental vision. Examples of this search are those that I listed above: a very conscious use of the subjective (and semi-subjective) camera; shooting at a zero distance to seek the contact with the character's body and the involvement of the spectator in the scene; and an extremely dynamic use of the camera, whose mechanical eye becomes the medium of the enunciation so strongly that, in a sense, it takes the place of the human medium – the director's eyes. We may find another example of this search in Bigelow's experiments with technology. In *Blue Steel*, to shoot inside the gun's barrel she used Innovision, a system of fibre optic bundles which 'gives the opportunity to insert the lens into small areas and have a light source at the very opening'.¹² The Innovision seems to achieve the goal which Siegfried Kracauer set for cinema: that of showing what normally escapes human observation. For *Strange Days* a special camera was built in order to reproduce the agility of the eye. These two experiments truly are attempts at extending the scope of both unmediated and instrument-mediated perception. The peak of this quest is clearly reached in *Strange Days* where, with the squid, Bigelow created a cyborg of perception – half human brain, half machine – without forgetting that, after all, the squid is nothing other than the camera.

As I said above, Bigelow tries to test the boundaries of both human and technological bodies, and to extend the scope of perception, but she is also very conscious of the danger of exceeding those limits – the mortal darkening. After all, 'the soul that seeks to extend the scope of its vision is destined to blindness and night', as Jean Starobinski warns us, naming some of the mythical characters whose story can prove this: Orpheus, Narcissus, Oedipus, Psyche and Medusa.¹³ Light and darkness: we are back to the two constitutive elements of both human perception and the cinematographic situation.

To show how deeply Bigelow's cinema ponders these questions I will analyse some aspects of *Blue Steel*, a film on which much has been written, yet whose complexity has not been exhausted.

11 In *Strange Days* this system is complicated by the fact that there are two types of instrument-mediated perception: the camera and, at a narrative level, the squid.

12 'Fiber bundles go where no camera has gone', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 70, no. 5 (1989), pp. 99–102 (author unknown).

13 Jean Starobinski, *The Living Eye*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

14 Linda Mizejewski, 'Picturing the female dick: *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Blue Steel*', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 45, nos 2–3 (1993), pp. 6–23; Yvonne Tasker, 'Blue Steel and women in the action picture', in *Spectacular Bodies, Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 158–62; Anna Powell, 'Blood on the borders: *Near Dark* and *Blue Steel*', *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 2 (1994), pp. 136–56; Robert T. Self, 'Redressing the law in Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel*', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1994), pp. 31–43.

15 The validity of this statement is reinforced by other analyses (for instance Powell, 'Blood on the borders') and finds correspondences in other films by Bigelow such as *Point Break*.

16 Anna Powell also discusses Megan's 'masculinity complex' in 'Blood on the borders', p. 144ff.

Most of the articles on *Blue Steel* that I have read analyse the film's narrative and the main character's profile from a sociological and psychological point of view.¹⁴ They investigate Megan's psyche and analyse the struggle between 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in which she partakes. Far from denying the importance of a political reading of *Blue Steel*, which is fundamental to a correct understanding both of the film and of the impact it had on critics and members of the public – especially on the female ones – I am suggesting that the film has much to offer also at the level of the enunciation. I intend to read *Blue Steel* in the light of the considerations I made above on Bigelow's cinema, as a search for self-identity led through the human and mechanical body, and in particular through the sense of sight.

To be able to affirm that Megan is in search of an identity, it suffices to examine the first four macro-sequences of the film. I consider the failed training to be the first one. The second, for me, comprises all the titles: the closeups of the gun; Megan putting on the uniform; the oath; the photographs with Tracey (Elizabeth Pena). The third is the scene in which Megan goes back home and finds her mother's message on her answering machine. The fourth consists of the dinner at her parents' house and the dialogue with her partner in the police car on the first night of duty.

These sequences introduce Megan as a very nervous and anxious character: during the training, in fact, she does not dominate the situation, she is too tense and fails. She is also introduced as a character whose sexuality is ambivalent: she looks androgynous; she wears an extremely masculine uniform over an extremely feminine bra; she wears a gun, which is an evident phallic symbol throughout the film;¹⁵ she is looked at in a sexual way by two girls who walk past her in the street; she defies definition (exemplified by the vague compliment she receives in the third macro-sequence: 'Look at you! You look, . . . you know . . .'). Finally, she is in aggressive competition with her father: in the dinner scene at her parents' house, she provokes her father, who is evidently cross with her, until he exclaims 'I have a goddamn cop for a daughter'. Let us also notice that this sentence highlights once again Megan's ambivalent sexuality. To be a cop and a daughter at the same time is clearly considered by Megan's father to be a paradox.

Thus, after the first fifteen minutes of film, we already know that Megan has a problem of identity which is probably linked to her relationship with her father and looks very much like an Oedipus complex. Megan can be said to have developed a 'masculinity complex' in the sense that – in Freudian terms – she refuses to abandon her male aims, remaining in her pre-Oedipal, bisexual phase.¹⁶ She does not seem able to overcome her lack of the phallus – a lack which every little girl, once again according to Freud, realizes at the phallic stage – and she has found a symbolic substitute for it in the gun.

Megan's path from her Oedipal crisis towards a 'normal womanhood' has been followed more than once, and with similar results in the articles mentioned above. The 'making of a lady' and the 'making of a cop' are the main processes (at least ambivalent, if not contradictory) which concern *Blue Steel*'s protagonist.

My interest here is to examine the ways in which Megan searches for a self-identity, and what the modalities of searching imply.

The film's opening section, which concludes, I would argue, at the end of the supermarket sequence, is strongly characterized by Megan's subjective modality of vision. Her gaze in this part of the film is extraordinarily active, mobile and restless: a clearly searching and wandering gaze. In this first section there are several subjective shots, most of which appear in the supermarket scene. There are also three semi-subjective shots and even a look into the camera. The latter constitutes a very strong presence, it being a type of shot that has been almost codified as a taboo by the classical fiction cinema. After preparing herself for the swearing-in ceremony, Megan's face turns to the camera, looks straight into the lens and smiles. She could be said to be looking at herself in a mirror with satisfaction, but there is no evidence of a mirror. By looking into the camera, she looks straight into the spectator's eyes, in a certain sense making clear that she is not just the spectator's viewed object, but also a viewing subject – and, by analogy, that the same pertains to the spectator's situation.

The second semi-subjective shot that appears in the film is at least as important as the one of the opening scene.¹⁷ After the dinner at her parents' house and the conversation with her partner in the police car, Megan is in a coffee shop. While the other cop goes to the toilet, Megan looks through the shop window. As in a canonical POV, we are shown a medium shot of Megan looking. After a cut, a panning shot from the right to the left shows us what she sees: the windows of Sloan's, a supermarket on the other side of the road. The subjective camera movement, though, ends on Megan, who is revealed once again to be part of her own vision.

The whole scene in the coffee shop is particularly significant and is the turning-point of the film. In the subjective panning shot on Sloan's windows, the camera follows a customer walking with a basket in his hand: Eugene. This is the first time he appears in the film. After a cut, we have another medium shot of Megan, her face very attentive as if her gaze was strongly attracted by the supermarket. A series of details and medium shots inside the supermarket follow. From her perspective, Megan cannot see things in the same way that the camera shows them to us. After a medium shot of a young man in a leather jacket who walks towards the camera, we go back to a closeup of Megan. She starts, her attention growing as if she had a premonition. In fact, nothing has happened yet, and, as I said, from her position she could not even see things as we did. Back in the supermarket, a series of fast closeups describes the beginning of the robbery.

17 The third semi-subjective shot, which I will not discuss, is in the supermarket scene and is formed by a full-length shot of Megan in an aisle plus a very fast panning shot which – with the effect of a rubber band – follows her gaze towards the left and then moves quickly back on her body.

Up until now, this scene revealed that a gaze as intentional and searching as Megan's is an opening onto the world, and is destined to find an object to watch, and to which to relate: here, Eugene. Secondly, Megan has shown herself to be a seer, both in the sense of one who sees that which is visible, and of one who is able to foresee, to see ahead. Megan's ability to sense that something is about to happen will emerge twice later on in the film: the first time when she is parked in her car outside Eugene's apartment, having waited all night long, and she starts as if she knew that he was about to appear; the second time, she foresees Eugene's arrival behind her in the underground station, at the beginning of their final duel.

In the film's opening scene, on the other hand, Megan seemed to lack another ability, that of seeing behind. In fact, during the training, after having 'killed' the man, she did not sense the presence of another danger in the room, and she got herself 'killed' by the woman. On that occasion, her trainer had warned her in the following way: 'In the field, you must have eyes in the back of your head'. In other words, you must look back in order to be able to see ahead, or, even, you must remember to be able to (fore)see. The training scene is clearly a metaphor for Megan's failure to recognize the danger constituted by Eugene. If Megan had looked back she would have seen herself threatened by her father, in the same way she will be threatened by Eugene.

But the scene that we are analysing has yet more to offer. Back in the coffee shop, we have a closeup of Megan made tense by what has turned out to be a robbery. Called by the waiter, who stands behind her, she suddenly turns and knocks over her coffee. After a cut, there is another closeup of Megan who turns and looks towards her left, followed by an extremely quick panning shot from left to right, which starts on the shop toilet sign and ends on Sloan's neon sign. This subjective shot is classically followed by another closeup of Megan, who attentively gazes at the supermarket windows before running out of the shop.

The whole scene is constructed around Megan's gaze. While looking at the toilet sign she evidently weighs the possibility of informing her partner, but her gaze is irresistibly attracted by Sloan's windows. She decides to run out of the shop alone – her partner's exclusion is deliberate and totally unnecessary. Megan clearly wants to face the emergency on her own. She is the one who (fore)saw. The action taking place in the supermarket is, in a sense, the object of her intense gaze.

In the supermarket, Megan faces the robber: she points her gun at him and orders him to put his weapon down. Insulting her, the man swings his gun towards Megan, but she shoots first, blowing him away. The robber's weapon falls onto the floor, just before Eugene's eyes. Eugene hides the gun: the same gun with which, soon after, he himself will start to kill.

The first time that we see Eugene is through Megan's eyes. The importance of this consideration is reinforced by the official poster of *Blue Steel*: a closeup of Megan who looks intensely towards the right. Megan's right eye is also included in the frame of a picture of Eugene walking in a street with the gun in his hand. He seems to be a projection of her visual apparatus, or of her foresight.



Not only does Eugene appear in the film for the first time as an object of Megan's perception, but he is pushed to his murderous activity when Megan in turn becomes an object of *his* perception. He will confess precisely this later on in the film. In the scene of their first evening spent together in a restaurant, he begins a sentence which remains unfinished: 'The first time I laid eyes on you . . .'. This sentence finds its conclusion when, a few nights later, in his apartment, Eugene tells Megan, 'You shot him without blinking an eye'. This line also highlights the special relationship that exists between gun and sight in *Blue Steel*. On the one hand, here, and in other parts of the film, the gun is connected to the human eye. On the other hand, the gun is related to the camera. As Linda Mizejewski noted, during the credits, in which the camera moves over the surfaces of the gun, the spinning barrel 'photographed from its round, flat end . . . strongly resembles a turning film reel'.¹⁸ Furthermore, the lenses of the special camera used by Bigelow, the Innovision, are said to 'most closely resemble shotgun barrels'.¹⁹ The eye and the camera are guns that look, that penetrate with the gaze.

The special relationship instantly born between Megan and Eugene is based on their perceptive activity. After all, when Eugene wants to

¹⁸ Mizejewski, 'Picturing the female dick', pp. 15–16.

¹⁹ 'Fiber bundles go where no camera has gone', p. 99.

20 Powell, 'Blood on the borders', p. 149.

21 Note again the juxtaposition of light and darkness ('nothing').

22 The meaningful use of names in *Blue Steel* has often been highlighted, for instance by Self in 'Redressing the law in Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel*', p. 40.

23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 222.

24 For a clear account of the system of four terms and its relationship with cinema, see Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, pp. 104–28. Merleau-Ponty's theory is in his 'The child's relation with Others', trans. William Cobb, in James M. Edie (ed.), *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 135–6.

seduce Megan he takes her to fly over New York in a helicopter, offering her access to his 'omnipotent gaze', as Anna Powell describes it.²⁰ Furthermore, Eugene started to kill when he saw Megan kill, or, precisely, when he saw Megan shoot a man as she watched him 'without blinking an eye'. 'The first time I saw you, I found my brightness. I have seen that brightness in you', Eugene tells Megan, and during most of the narrative he will try to find on his victims' faces that brightness he saw in Megan's eyes while she was killing. While holding his gun to Nick's head, in fact, Eugene tells him: 'Look at me, look at me, I wanna see you, I wanna see you see it, see it in your face – the reverence, the light, then nothing'.²¹

But to see the brightness on his victims' faces is not enough for Eugene. He wants to see it again on Megan's, and he will do everything to bring back that steely gaze in her eyes. He will chase her (after all, his surname is Hunt), he will kill her best friend, threaten her mother, and, finally, rape her.

After the scene in the supermarket, and with the beginning of a relationship between Megan and Eugene, Megan's gaze seems to lose its extreme mobility. No more subjective and semi-subjective shots, no more looks into the camera. The rest of the film is literally dominated by a different cinematographic figure, this time not of the subjectivity but of the reciprocity of the gaze: the shot/reverse-shot. This is a typical figure of classic narrative film and a cardinal point of the continuity editing of classic Hollywood cinema. Often criticized as a false and ideological shot, it is here used very consciously by Bigelow, in a way that is symbolic of her whole cinema: popular and classic on the surface, but deep down nonconformist and authorial. In fact, the passage to the shot/reverse-shot is due to the fact that while in the first part of *Blue Steel* Megan's gaze is searching (for an object, for a self-identity), in the second part her gaze has found its object (Eugene). Me(gan) has found a Eu(gene),²² the Other as an-Other-from-my-Self but similar to my-Self, and therefore useful in the construction of an identity. As Sartre put it, 'I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being'.²³

It is common knowledge that both psychoanalysis and philosophy deal with the problem of the relationship with the Other. In the following paragraphs, I will once again refer to Merleau-Ponty's work, this time in relation to that of Sartre and Lacan.

According to Merleau-Ponty's discussion on the formation of self-identity in terms of the Other – which is a correction of the famous Lacanian 'schema L'²⁴ – my experience of the Other is constructed by contrast and comparison with my experience of myself. While I have access to my psyche, to the introceptive image of my own body, and to the visual body of the Other, the Other's psyche is invisible. The Other's psyche is a hypothetical term, but it is logically intuited by me on the basis of a comparison with myself. The Other's visual body works as a signifier of the Other's psyche. This allows me

to differentiate the Other, initially my intentional object, as a subject-for-itself.

It is clear, even from this extremely simplified and schematic account of Merleau-Ponty's system of four terms, that his ideas on the relationship with the Other are related to, but at the same time substantially different from, those of Lacan and Sartre. In Merleau-Ponty's conception lies the idea that our subjectivity is an intersubjectivity (the Other and I mirror each other): an intersubjectivity which is not necessarily aggressive.

On the other hand, the relationship between Self and Other may also be – in Lacanian and Sartrian terms – competitive and alienating. I can in fact become the object of the Other's intentionality. Even more: 'I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret: the secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me.'²⁵

Megan's search for a self-identity takes the form of an oscillation between these two poles of the relationship with the Other. To show how, I must go back to Megan's identity crisis.

The reiteration in the dialogue of the verb 'to see' in all its forms is indicative of the importance of the activity of perception in *Blue Steel*. During the first part of the film, there is an insistence on the expression 'Look at you'. This is the line of the man who meets Megan, wearing her uniform for the first time, outside her apartment. This is also her mother's sentence when she goes to see Megan at the police station, shortly after the killing in the supermarket. The expression highlights the difficulty for those around Megan of 'seeing' her, of recognizing her identity, or Megan's difficulty in seeing herself with their eyes. The problem lies clearly in the fact that she is a girl in uniform. Why, at the height of her crisis, which looks very much like an Oedipal phase, did Megan decide to become a cop?

During the narrative Megan is asked three times the key question 'Why did you want to become a cop?'. It is her partner who asks her the first time. He does not let Megan answer immediately, and instead adds: 'I looked at those guys dressed in blue and I said to myself: nobody fucks with a cop'. She nods and then, finally, answers: 'I wanted to shoot people'. The second time is at Tracey's party. The question comes from a man who has just been introduced to Megan and who seems to be interested in her. But this is only until he realizes that she is a cop and wears a gun, facts that deeply shock and disgust him. And why would she wear a gun, he says, since she is 'a good looking woman – beautiful in fact'? Megan's answer this time is: 'I like to slam people's heads up against the wall'.

The two answers are, of course, jokes. But, if we follow Freud, jokes are, together with dreams and parapraxis, the key to the unconscious. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud

26 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 116.

distinguishes four types of jokes: obscene, aggressive, cynical or blasphemous, sceptical. Megan's are clearly of the second type: through them – once again according to Freud – Megan pleases her libidinal drive avoiding the obstacle of censorship, which tries to stop her from enjoying the aggression.

If it is Megan's unconscious speaking here, we are told that Megan wanted to become a cop because of her aggressive drive. Where does this aggression come from?

Let us examine Megan's answers again. The first one appears just after the scene of the dinner at Megan's parents, to which it is strictly linked. In that scene, Megan showed us that now that she is a cop she can challenge her father, that she is on the same level as he is. If we consider the words of the colleague who asked her the question for the first time, we can see how the fact of being a cop is a way of protecting oneself from other people's aggression. Being a cop, Megan cannot 'be fucked with', she can protect herself from the aggressive penis – and from the aggressive eye, if we connect again gun and perceptive organ.

On the second occasion, the man who asks Megan the same question wonders why she wanted to become a cop since she is a beautiful woman. This sentence is certainly very significant and connected to the castration complex. As Juliet Mitchell phrased it, in Freudian terms 'a woman compensates for the great hurt [of realizing that she will never have a penis] by making her whole body into a proud substitute. She has to develop her threatened narcissism in order to make herself loved and adored.'²⁶ In these terms, the man's sentence may be read as: 'Why do you want a gun (a phallus) if you are a woman; why don't you accept that you cannot have one and compensate for the loss with your beauty and vanity?', or, even better: 'Why don't you give up the active behaviour of your pre-Oedipal being and embrace the passive behaviour of a woman, therefore falling in love with a man?'.

These two scenes tell us that Megan uses her aggression to protect herself from her father's aggression, and that she is not ready yet to give up her masculine, active aims. At the same time, however, we know that she would like to find a man and have children. Megan oscillates between the possibilities of being a passive and submissive woman, as the patriarchal society wants her to be, or an active and aggressive woman, as a reaction to her father's violence. This oscillation for Megan passes through perception and assumes the shape of a struggle between the contrasting desires of being a viewing subject and, at the same time, a viewed object.

Approached by a still-charming Eugene, invited to eat in a very elegant and romantic restaurant (improbably named 'Boeuf à la Mode'), Megan – who is constantly invited to 'look at herself' – this time turns the burning question to Eugene, who does actually seem able to 'see' Megan both as a cop and as a woman. 'Look', she invites

27 The fact that Eugene does not consider Megan as a subject-for-itself is confirmed by what he tells her in the restaurant: 'You reminded me of a cat I used to have'. Nick's attitude towards Megan is not different: 'I own you', he tells her one night.

28 Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, p. 127.

him. 'What?', he asks. 'Me', is her answer. 'What about you?' 'Why me?' Eugene's answer does not come at this point, but later, in the sequence in which he reveals himself to Megan. Why did he choose Megan? 'You don't see it, do you? Not yet. I know you better than you know yourself. We are two halves of the same person, you and I.' It is now clear that, in terms of the relation with the Other, while Megan is able to see Eugene as a subject-for-itself (in Merleau-Ponty's terms, a body which is similar to mine with a psyche which must be similar to mine), Eugene sees Megan as a part of himself, he incorporates her.²⁷ We are here clearly in the territory of both the Lacanian and Sartrian descriptions of a relationship of objectification and rivalry with the Other, which oscillates between love and hate, sadism and masochism. Nonetheless, according to Merleau-Ponty, 'such rivalry rests upon an implicit and lived knowledge of the reversibility of its terms. The dualism it announces is false. There could be no rivalry were we not vulnerable to each other as each other.'²⁸ And it is precisely this reversibility that forms the basis of the long battle between Megan and Eugene. The latter, in fact, oscillates as much as she does between activity and passivity, sadism and masochism, life and death. He makes of Megan an object of his intentionality, but his ultimate desire is to become, in his turn, an object of *her* intentionality – of being looked at by her 'without blinking an eye'.

Not only is the relationship between Megan and Eugene based on their perceptive activity, but also the one between Megan and Nick (Clancy Brown). 'I'll be seeing you!', Megan threatens him the first time she meets him at the police station, after the killing in the supermarket. But it is Nick who will 'be seeing her'. When, after Tracey's murder, Megan decides to park her car outside Eugene's apartment and wait for his next move, Nick orders her on the radio to 'just watch'. 'I trust you totally, Megan', he says when she protests, but the camera pans backwards and shows us Nick in his car, which is parked just a few metres behind Megan's, ready to sit there for the night and 'be seeing her'. Once again, Megan should have had eyes on the back of her head. The morning after, Megan runs after Eugene in the park and challenges him to get her gun from its holster. Nick intervenes to stop her. 'Why were you following me?', Megan asks Nick later, 'You didn't think I could handle it?' 'I was watching you handle it', Nick answers.

But Megan does not want to 'just watch', nor to have somebody 'watching her' acting. It is for this reason that she will handcuff Nick to the car's steering wheel. In a sense, by doing this she puts Nick in the specular situation of having Eugene watching him, with the gun to his head – 'Look at me, I wanna see you, I wanna see you see it . . .'.

Blue Steel is entirely constructed on an oscillation between the roles of viewing subject and viewed object. The match is played on the ground of the characters' perceptive activity – a wait and see ('Just

²⁹ After all, the verb 'to guard' shares the same root as the Italian *guardare* and the French *regarder* which mean 'to look at, to watch, to gaze upon'.

watch!'), and a desire to be watched ('Look at me!'); a looking at one's Self (the semi-subjective shots, Eugene pointing the gun at himself in the mirror) and a looking at each-Other (the shot/reverse-shot, the look into the camera); a threatening look ('I'll be seeing you') and a guarding look²⁹ ('I was watching you handle it'); the instruction to watch the Other watching (Eugene who forces his victims to look at him) and the enforced watching of the Other (Eugene's victims).

The ultimate experience to which this perceptive game leads the characters is death – or the vision of it. 'For him, it's about seeing himself through other people's eyes', Faith says in *Strange Days*. The same applies to Megan and Eugene. But what they see in other people's eyes is death (their own death) – as in *Strange Days*, and as in *Twelve Monkeys*. Eugene wants his victims to see their death in his own eyes, but ultimately he wants to live the same experience, and see his own death in Megan's eyes. 'Megan is the greatest kick of all', he tells her parents. 'Death is the greatest kick of all', he tells Megan in his apartment. And Megan, at the end, becomes his death. After their long duel, she finally looks at him 'without blinking an eye' and dispatches him, not without leaving him the time to contemplate his own death in her steely gaze.

But if it is true that perception takes place in the indistinguishability of perceiving and being perceived, and in the reversibility of seeing and being seen, then this experience also must have been reciprocal. Megan looked and was looked at, again through a shot/reverse-shot. She too must have seen death in the mirror of his eyes. In the very last sequence, in fact, for the first and only time in the film, Megan does not look. Sitting in her car, totally shattered, her gaze is absent, darkened, completely catatonic. It is a long, opaque instant in which life is suspended, and sight with it.

I wish to thank Catriona Leahy for our fruitful conversations on the visual apparatus and the English language.

'Drama' into 'news': strategies of intervention in 'The Wednesday Play'

M.K. MACMURRAUGH-KAVANAGH

Under the Director-Generalship of Sir Hugh Carlton-Greene (1960–69), the BBC found itself in the midst of an internal revolution which mirrored the shifts in attitude and direction evident in British society as a whole. Perceived in terms of popular mythology as a period of liberalization, the 1960s were, in fact, years of radical division in which sociocultural parameters, which were still tenaciously guarded by the defenders of a vanishing status quo, were aggressively challenged by progressive factions. Sites of contestation included the interpretation of contemporary events, with the myth of affluence, for example, promoted by one faction and undermined by another. Although space does not allow for a detailed analysis here of these conflicts and their origins in the sociohistorical development of postwar consciousness, it should be noted that such conflicts characterize the 1960s as a period of schizophrenic division and hostile encounter.

One aspect of the fight for redefinition and social interpretation was rehearsed in a range of institutional debates. These tended to focus on key concepts which subsequently became the battlegrounds on which the war between factions was waged. Within the BBC, one such key concept was the notion of 'objectivity' as laid down by the Royal Charter. Although the BBC was legally forbidden to express opinions on matters of current affairs policy, a number of writers, producers and directors within the Corporation began to perceive that objectivity

was an impossibility given the realities of television transmission and reception: the neutral image could not exist. As a result, men such as James MacTaggart, Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, responding to the urgency of social debate, perceived that since television was the medium of the 'message', that message was ripe for appropriation.

This discussion explores the variety of ways in which the key concept of objectivity was challenged within the BBC by MacTaggart, Garnett and Loach through their work on 'The Wednesday Play' series, which ran on BBC 1 from 1964 until 1969. The strategies they employed in their direct attempts to intervene in the ongoing and increasingly hostile social debate (and to influence public opinion and Parliamentary legislation) will be examined using material gathered from contemporary media comment and from extensive documentation held at the BBC Written Archive Centre. The argument which I wish to propose is that this intervention was attempted not simply through the plays themselves, but also through a concerted manipulation of debate, and that the message of dramas such as *Up the Junction* (transmitted 3 November 1965) and *Cathy Come Home* (first transmitted 16 November 1966) was constructed through a binary discursive movement between parallel texts which positioned meaning as mutable and in a permanent state of creation.

'The Wednesday Play', though born out of expediency and subject always to tight controls, flourished in the atmosphere created by Sir Hugh Carlton-Greene during his Director-Generalship. Casting himself as an enemy of 'ivory tower stuffiness' and as an innovator keen to 'encourage enterprise and the taking of risks', Greene believed it was the BBC's role to hold up a mirror to a changing society.¹ There is no doubt that Greene's approach to Public Service philosophy conditioned the entire atmosphere of the Corporation during these years, leading to the creation of conditions wherein producers such as MacTaggart and Garnett could (under surveillance) express and present material alien to the increasingly outmoded concept of objectivity in 'The Wednesday Play' strand.

It is important to recognize at the outset that to regard this play strand as a unified body of work possessed of a single, definable identity is to make a serious error. During its five-year run, its identity depended entirely on the producer in overall control at the time. Between January 1965 and October 1966, the strand was alternately produced by Peter Luke and James MacTaggart, men of radically differing views when it came to the aims and means of television drama. For Luke, with his theatrical background and traditional tastes (given full rein in his series 'Festival'), 'The Wednesday Play' was 'not a political platform' but was a space for erudite entertainment;² for MacTaggart, with his tabloid taste for the individualized story and his concern for contemporaneity (given full rein in his series 'First Night'), 'The Wednesday Play' could not have been more suited to a 'political platform' since it occupied Establishment space and was

1 Sir Hugh Greene, *The Third Floor Front: a View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), p. 14.

2 Peter Luke's reason for rejecting Jeremy Sandford's script, *Cathy Come Home*, in 1965; quoted in Irene Shubik, *Play for Today: the Evolution of Television Drama* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), p. 129.

therefore bound to occupy a political position whether it meant to or not. It is significant that it is the dramas which were produced by MacTaggart, rather than Luke, that condition the popular and critical memory of 'The Wednesday Play'.

From November 1966 to May 1967, the strand was alternately produced by Lionel Harris and Tony Garnett – Garnett joining MacTaggart in 'The Wednesday Play's' hall of fame. Where Luke, MacTaggart and Harris worked within the mainstream systems of the Drama Group, Garnett was from the first accorded a privileged position within it, being allowed a ten-week turn-round (as opposed to the standard seven), extra film, a higher programme allowance and a longer team production period than the other producers.³ Sydney Newman, Head of Drama Group, had recognized in Garnett a man committed to his own brand of 'agitational contemporaneity'⁴ who was likely to win audiences and headlines and who would 'provide the extra flash of orange every three weeks or so' to Lionel Harris's 'more conventional' series of plays.⁵ In this, Garnett was to surpass even Newman's expectations of him.

Of all the producers involved in 'The Wednesday Play' during these formative years, Garnett was the most committed to film. The advent of innovations in lightweight filming equipment freed drama from the confines of the studio (as well as from the surveillance that the studio implied), but until the mid 1960s film was only used sporadically to link interior shots, shoot exteriors, or cover short exchanges before the whole was spliced into the bulk of the work which had been taped at frantic speed in the studio. It was Garnett, MacTaggart and Loach who reversed this situation and so smashed the form of television drama, remoulding it in a new image. But to smash form is also to smash content, and it is here that intervention, controversy and the charges of propaganda began.

Garnett has stated that his commitment to film was based on a desire to 'be out in the world where people were living', to transfer 'drama' (events which happen to other people) to the domain of real life as it is lived.⁶ He realized that dealing with the issues of abortion or homelessness in the necessarily alienated environment of the studio looked and, more importantly, *felt* entirely different to dealing with them in the streets where these issues were daily concerns. When placed in the 'real world', and filmed in such a way as to emphasize this reality, these daily concerns were transferred into urgent problems requiring immediate attention. In the studio, suspended from society, such issues seemed contained; but out in society, suspended from the studio, they became crises. In addition, film implied documentary 'truth', a level of 'fact' that studio-based recording could never achieve.

Film, then, enabled the 'real world' to invade bourgeois living rooms the length and breadth of the country, refusing complacency by insistently presenting a series of social ills that had previously passed

³ As reported in Notes of Meeting held in D.G.O.'s Office on 26 January 1965 to discuss proposals for 'Wednesday Play' Productions of Tony Garnett; BBC Written Archives Centre (hereafter referenced as BBC WAC), Ref: T5/695/1 – General File 1965.

⁴ Sydney Newman quoted in Robert MacDonald, 'BBC viewers to get "agitational drama"', *The Scotsman*, 17 August 1966.

⁵ Memo from Sydney Newman to Michael Peacock (Controller, BBC 1), 31 March 1966, BBC WAC Ref: T5/695/2 – General File 1966.

⁶ Tony Garnett interviewed on *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 6 November 1993.

unacknowledged and thus unremedied. That this was frequently effected through the techniques of drama documentary intensified the 'message' since it implied a further layer of veracity. This naturally led to a controversy of its own when commentators' objections to the political content of work such as *Cathy Come Home* became masked in concerns focusing on the boundary between 'fact' and 'fiction' which appeared to be under threat. Garnett's argument, in response, was that where 'news and current affairs deal in what they rather mendaciously call "fact" and often tell lies, we deal in fiction and try to tell the truth', thus drawing attention to the illogicality of assuming that documentaries are necessarily objective, believable, and therefore 'true'.⁷

7 Ibid.

Even so, the charges of dishonesty began to fly thick and fast. What was at stake here was a conflicting definition of 'truth' and a fight for control over what was accused of being 'propaganda'. MacTaggart, Loach and Garnett had opened a new channel of discourse which could present a version of the truth contesting that offered by politicians and Establishment representatives; this truth could destroy myths at one stroke (as in the case of *Cathy Come Home* and the myth of affluence), and lobby for change by focusing 'fact' through emotional and physical reality (as in the case of *Up the Junction* and abortion law reform). The objection, then, to the type of drama presented by Garnett and MacTaggart in the mid 1960s was not simply that it was propagandist but that it was winning the propaganda war hands down.

These producers were aided in their interventionist campaign by one important fact about 'The Wednesday Play' which has been consistently overlooked in critical analyses of the strand. The scheduling of the series meant that most plays were transmitted after the evening news; not only did this guarantee a sizeable inherited audience, but through the plays' proximity to 'fact', an atmosphere of veracity could be inherited as well. As Raymond Williams points out, this element of 'sequence' is central to the viewer's experience of television:

one of the most obvious elements of television is its quality as sequence. We can switch on and off for particular programmes but in some ways the programmes are conceived as a whole and they're often received as a continuity.⁸

8 Raymond Williams, in Alan O'Connor (ed.), *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 133.

That this potential was recognized and fully exploited by producers such as Garnett and MacTaggart is made clear by Ken Loach, who states that 'we had wanted to make programmes and make plays or films that got the same response as when you saw the news because we came after the news'. But where the news offered a sanitized version of reality, tidy and apparently objective, Loach and his producers saw themselves as 'part of the news' but as providing 'reports from the front line' (an impression that would have been

9 Ken Loach, interviewed on *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 6 November 1993.

impossible without the aid of film).⁹ 'The Wednesday Play' was therefore felt to be perfectly positioned to pass direct comment on a range of sociopolitical issues since it followed 'official fact' and would be received in the same mind-set. Further, it could contest that 'fact' with an 'unofficial' equivalent (thus questioning the assumption that 'truth' is objective and stable) or reprioritize concerns by focusing on issues ignored by the bulletins. For example, homelessness is rarely a newsworthy story but *Cathy Come Home* insisted that it *should* be, by drawing attention to an unrecognized crisis that rendered a newsworthy balance-of-payment report irrelevant in terms of 'real life' as it is lived by the majority. Combining a tabloid focus on an individualized story with a documentary emphasis on 'fact' and statistics, the play blurred the boundaries between forms and drew 'drama' into the territories of current affairs and 'real life'. *Cathy Come Home* was to become typical of the way in which 'The Wednesday Play', under the producerships of MacTaggart and Garnett, became 'news' and simultaneously redefined the precepts of both 'news' and 'drama'.

Early plays in this series such as John Hopkins's *Fable* (transmitted 27 January 1965, directed by Christopher Morahan), Hopkins's *Horror of Darkness* (transmitted 10 March 1965, directed by Anthony Page), and James O'Connor's *Three Clear Sundays* (transmitted 7 April 1965, directed by Ken Loach), all produced by MacTaggart, set the tone for the clear intervention in issues of social legislation that was to characterize one strain of 'The Wednesday Play'. Dealing with immigration/apartheid, homosexuality and capital punishment respectively, each sought to pass comment on the urgent need for new legislation in these areas by focusing attention on the emotional cost of the current situation and, in the case of *Fable*, on the political consequences of the failure to take immediate action. These plays met with mixed success not only in terms of audience response but also in the effectiveness of their messages.

Three Clear Sundays appears to have been the most successful of the three in these terms, being described by one journalist as 'a savagely eloquent . . . anti-hanging tract' which had rendered him capable of 'nothing but stunned, horrified concentration on the screen'.¹⁰ A number of readers' letters printed in newspapers also suggest that O'Connor's work had a marked effect on public opinion in relation to the ongoing debate on the death penalty. One correspondent states: 'Until I saw the BBC TV play *Three Clear Sundays* I was undecided about capital punishment. Now I am convinced that this barbaric act of ending human life is better abolished.'¹¹ However, it is worth pointing out that any small swing in public opinion that this play may have effected was temporary only; Peter Thompson records that the proposal to abolish capital punishment 'provoked widespread hostility, regardless of age, gender or voting preference. Between sixty-one and eighty-two per cent of the

10 Peter Quince, 'Happy, happy Harlow!', *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 April 1965.

11 Reader's letter, *The Daily Mirror*, 12 April 1965.

12 Peter Thompson, 'Labour's "Gannex conscience"? Politics and popular attitudes in the "Permissive Society"', in R. Cooley, S. Fielding and N. Tiratsoo (eds), *The Wilson Governments, 1964-1970* (London: Pinter, 1993), p. 143.

13 BBC Audience Research Report, 29 March 1965, issued by the BBC Audience Research Department, BBC WAC Ref: T5/1,497/1 - *Horror of Darkness*.

14 As recorded in the BBC Audience Research Report, 12 February 1965, issued by the BBC Audience Research Department, BBC WAC Ref: T5/1,349 - *Fable*. The average percentage viewing figure for 'The Wednesday Play' at this time was between ten and twelve per cent of the population.

15 Ibid.

public were in favour of the death penalty across the decade.¹² In 1965, then, comment on social issues may have caused a stir, and even a wave of sympathy, but the possibility of a profound change in opinion seemed unlikely.

Horror of Darkness, on the other hand, failed even to make a temporary impression on public opinion. Recorded for transmission in the scrapped 'First Night' series of plays, this dealt with the loneliness of homosexuals forced to live an alienated life of lies and deceit in a society which criminalized them. Culminating in a suicide, this intense drama constituted a powerful appeal for decriminalization but scored an extremely low '40' on the Audience Reaction Index (the average for 'The Wednesday Play' in 1965 was 56). Comments from those interviewed for the Audience Research Report include disgusted objections to the appearance of this subject on television, while many also felt that forcing viewers to confront topics they found 'nauseating' would only harden opinion against these issues.¹³

But where *Three Clear Sundays* and *Horror of Darkness* had at least been clear in their messages, *Fable* revealed the danger of misinterpretation inherent in dramatic attempts to intervene in sociopolitical policy. In this play, Hopkins had presented a Britain where the black population had seized command and where whites were brutalized and subjugated. The play had been written as a protest against apartheid, an increasingly urgent issue in South Africa where yet more repressive legislation had recently been passed. With the possibility that the racist Gordon Walker might be elected to Parliament as the representative for Smethwick, the argument of Hopkins's play was that apartheid could one day become a reality in Britain: *Fable* was a plea for tolerance and for anti-discrimination legislation to deter this threat.

With its transmission delayed by a week due to its relevance to a by-election in which race had become an issue, *Fable* had enjoyed a high profile even prior to its screening (the BBC was threatened with fire-bombing if it went ahead with the broadcast) and the play subsequently gained a large audience, attracting fourteen per cent of the population.¹⁴ However, while many of those interviewed for the Audience Research Report appear to have responded to Hopkins's call to action, it is clear that the action they had in mind was of a rather different nature to what Hopkins had intended: many of the interviewees had read the play as a warning about the threat of black power in Britain and had concluded that 'it's time there was something done on this problem'.¹⁵ In a real sense, then, the attempt at direct intervention in issues of social legislation had backfired badly, making the very situation that Hopkins was protesting about potentially a great deal worse. Policing the margins of interpretation was a problem that had not yet been solved.

None of these early attempts to influence public opinion in favour of changes in social legislation had caused more than a temporary stir. It was time for a change of tactics, for the implementation of new forms and for the construction of new levels of debate. The result was arguably the most controversial drama presented in 'The Wednesday Play' series: Nell Dunn's *Up the Junction*.

There is no doubt that this play was designed and screened as a direct attempt to influence public opinion in relation to David Steel's Abortion Law Reform Bill that was being debated in Parliament at the time. Tony Garnett, story editor of *Up the Junction*, admits to a 'particular', 'personal agenda' in the scripting of this drama, an 'agenda' which appears to have been shared by the Corporation in general: as Mary Whitehouse points out, when a repeat of Dunn's play was withdrawn from schedules due to the threat of legal action (the official reason), the BBC screened in its place an edition of *24 Hours*, 'an emotive programme about backstreet abortionists which was calculated to enlist every voter in the country in support of David Steel's bill'.¹⁶ This Bill, she adds, was to be debated in the House of Commons the following day.

So now, not only was 'The Wednesday Play' attempting direct intervention in matters of social legislation, but the BBC was discarding the precepts of objectivity and actively supporting it. Encouraged by Garnett and MacTaggart (who story edited and produced the play respectively), it set about converting *Up the Junction* into a talking-point by organizing a discussion of the issues it raised on BBC 2's *Late Night Line-Up* and BBC Radio Home Service's *The Critics*, both aired following transmission. On television, the play had now been sandwiched between a news bulletin and a topical debate, thus constructing an instant network of dialogue and an unmistakable flow of meaning.

The 'meaning' of the play itself, however, proved eminently 'mistakeable', with critics and audiences alike reading the play as a moral story warning against the price of promiscuity (an agonizing abortion and the risk of subsequent sterility) rather than as a demand that backstreet abortionists should be made obsolete through liberalizing legislation. Peter Black of the *Daily Mail*, for example, is typical in his misinterpretation of the play's message, stating that 'the terrified screams of the seventeen-year-old girl experiencing a miscarriage . . . must have satisfied the most ardent moralist'; he adds that 'the moral line of the story' was 'irreproachable', though he finds the play appalling in every other respect.¹⁷ The Audience Research Report similarly records that viewers had misunderstood the play's agenda, since the few comments expressing approval that are recorded here are based on 'the abortion scene, with its implications of "the wages of sin" [which] was enough to put the fear of death into anyone'.¹⁸ *Up the Junction* was, it seemed, a great deal more polysemic than Garnett had intended.

¹⁶ Mary Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV: from Protest to Participation* (London: Blandford Press, 1967), p. 168.

¹⁷ Peter Black, 'This must be just about THE LIMIT', *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1965.

¹⁸ Audience Research Report on *Up the Junction*, issued by the BBC Audience Research Department, 7 December 1965, BBC WAC Ref: T5/681 – *Up the Junction*.

19 Nell Dunn, quoted in A. Morgan Derham, 'Sound and vision', *The Christian*, 12 November 1965.

It is Garnett, rather than Dunn, who must be held responsible for this failure to limit the margins of interpretation because there is evidence to suggest that Dunn's 'agenda' in writing *Up the Junction* had been defeated by Garnett's 'agenda' in preparing the script for the screen. Speaking of her book upon which the play was based, Dunn stated that her intention had been 'to expose the hardships of working class life', which included poverty, exploitation and violence; only when controversy began to rage around the television adaptation did she begin to emphasize the need for abortion law reform.¹⁹ This suggests that a writer's 'message' could be hijacked by a story editor in the interests of promoting his own 'personal agenda'; it also questions our easy assumption that broadcasting corporations such as the BBC are keen to restrain sociopolitical comment and actively deter it through a number of institutional controls. In the case of 'The Wednesday Play's' *Up the Junction*, it is difficult not to read an institutional agenda as well as the personal agendas of writer and story editor.

Comment (even if it is misinterpreted) breeds controversy, and while the BBC was certainly keen to promote this play as a talking-point (simultaneously boosting the profile of 'The Wednesday Play' series), it quickly panicked when the controversy began to get out of hand. In the newspapers, columnists and reporters could write of little else for months, focusing on a range of debates and protests such as charges of propaganda in the drama-documentary form, the perceived damage done to the reputation of the Clapham Junction population, and the concerns accumulating around the uses and abuses of television drama. In this they were aided by a number of vocal pressure groups including, of course, Mary Whitehouse's VALA (Viewers' and Listeners' Association).

20 As reported in Whitehouse, p. 61.

Following the screening of this play, a delighted Press had smelled controversy and had besieged Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV*, asking what her next move was going to be.²⁰ A string of speeches and a coordinated campaign of protest followed, all of which was faithfully recorded in the newspapers which sensed here was a story that would run and run. The play itself would usually be mentioned or briefly discussed in an opening paragraph, before a journalist dwelt at length on one of the many issues it had raised: the Press was, in short, busily constructing a parallel text of comment, controversy and debate which kept *Up the Junction* in people's memories for months. As far as MacTaggart and Garnett were concerned, this was invaluable to the raising of consciousness and was doing far more in the interests of social intervention than the play itself had managed. It was a lesson that Garnett in particular would remember during the planning of *Cathy Come Home*.

But while the production team were delighted with this turn of events, the BBC was increasingly worried. The Press had certainly succeeded in creating discussion around *Up the Junction*, but little of

this reflected favourably on the Corporation since much focused on issues of propaganda and subversion. So long did these debates continue that when the play came up to its scheduled repeat date (June 1966), the protests against it were still raging from its first airing. Here the BBC found itself in a tricky position; it could hardly withdraw a play that had become such a national talking-point, and yet it needed to avoid increasingly threatening pressure from groups such as VALA who were well supported within Parliament. At the same time, withdrawing the play would be interpreted as a victory by these groups, humiliating the BBC and, potentially, damaging it beyond repair.

The BBC could only announce the repeat date, weather the blows of protest against it, and pray for a miraculous intervention of its own which finally came in the form of the threat of legal action from a chocolate manufacturer on whose premises the play had been partially filmed. Little of this fracas is recorded at BBC Archives, but Press records suggest that this entire episode is at best very murky. Unhappy about the shots of his factory, a Mr David Miranda had lodged an injunction against the BBC; Mr Miranda appears not to have expanded on the grounds of his objections in any newspaper interview that he gave, though it is possible that the substandard conditions that the film revealed reflected badly upon his reputation and had damaged his business. This is pure speculation, but it is clear that since Mr Miranda had given his permission for filming to take place (and had presumably been paid well for this), his case was unlikely to succeed in court. Despite this, the BBC withdrew the repeat instantly.

This, of course, initiated a fresh round of comment and controversy in the Press as journalists investigated the BBC's motives for backing down. Most detected the workings of expediency and the fear of further confrontation, with one journalist quoting Roger Smith (a veteran story editor on 'The Wednesday Play') who suggested that the BBC had 'found a convenient and pat excuse for wriggling out'.²¹ With the repeat of *Up the Junction* withdrawn, reports and articles continued to circulate around the decision for weeks, thus demonstrating the fact that by this point the parallel text of comment could survive independent of its progenitor.

According to Sydney Newman, writing to Huw Wheldon in June 1966, *Up the Junction* was 'messy, too long and looked down on the working class, but it was also revolutionary in drama technique': what Newman fails to add is that it was also 'revolutionary' in terms of its blatant refusal of objectivity (revealing this creed to be a fraud), and 'revolutionary' in terms of its construction of a chain of discourses which permeated national consciousness in a more pervasive way than a television drama alone could accomplish.²² Although Garnett's 'message' had been misinterpreted by the majority of the audience, at least the intention to send a message had been registered. With *Cathy Come Home*, Garnett would ensure that the problem of ambiguity was

²¹ Roger Smith quoted in Franklyn Wood, 'Why the BBC shunted *Up the Junction*', *Daily Sketch*, 17 June 1966.

²² Memo from Sydney Newman to Huw Wheldon, 15 June 1966, BBC WAC Ref: TS/695/2 – General File 1966.

rectified and that the penetration of mass consciousness through the manipulation of related media systems would achieve an unprecedented level of effectiveness.

Jeremy Sandford's aim in writing *Cathy Come Home* (originally titled *The Abyss*) was not to propose solutions to the housing crisis but simply to raise the level of concern. With Garnett producing the play and Ken Loach directing it, Sandford's 'story' was a remarkable success in these terms; the lessons that Garnett had learned from *Up the Junction* concerning the construction of a discursive network turned *Cathy Come Home* into a social phenomenon, while the urgency and veracity of Loach's direction constituted an unambiguous call for direct action. It is, in fact, the form of the play that is most often examined in analyses but in this discussion it is the formation of parallel texts, and the relationship between them, that is of most interest.

Sensing another talking-point drama, the BBC had again decided to follow the transmission of the play with a debate on the issues it raised in *Late Night Line-Up* (it was also debated in *24 Hours* following transmission of the repeat on 11 January 1967). But unlike *Up the Junction*, the controversial areas in this play barely concerned the BBC at all, focusing as they did on insufficient legislation and inept local councils. Appalled by what they had seen in the play, audiences were immediately confronted with local government officers desperately trying to prove that Sandford's facts were dubious and attempting to deflect criticism by accusing the BBC of transmitting propaganda. Viewers this time were unconvinced by this argument and their attitude towards the play and the squirming officials was well reflected in the Press: Lynda Dyson was one of several journalists who apportioned blame where it seemed most deserved:

Accusations should be made, not at Jeremy Sandford for dramatising the horrifying results of his research, nor at the BBC for presenting them, but at whoever is responsible for the sort of conditions illustrated in this play.²³

²³ Lynda Dyson, 'The play as I saw it', *The Birmingham Post*, 17 November 1966.

In contrast to the case of *Up the Junction*, with *Cathy Come Home* the Drama Group had a controversy on its hands which did not involve accusations of intentions to corrupt.

Cathy Come Home was immediately converted into 'news', a status it had already implied in its use of techniques which had encouraged the sense of an unmediated reality. This version of 'reality' was one that the Press recognized. Accordingly the Press completed the conversion of 'drama' into 'news' through its regular reporting of the local changes to housing regulations which were prompted by the public outcry caused by the play. Meanwhile, Sandford's 'story' was raised in a debate on housing in Parliament, with Labour MP Frank Allaun noting that *Cathy Come Home* had 'jolted' 'the conscience of the nation' and had educated everyone about the problems of slums,

²⁴ Frank Allaun (Labour MP for Salford, East) speaking in a Parliamentary debate during the second reading of the Housing Subsidies Bill on 15 December 1966, BBC WAC Ref: T5/695/1 – *Cathy Come Home*.

²⁵ The Minister for Housing quoted in a memo from Tony Garnett to Sydney Newman, 1 December 1966: Report on Meeting at the Ministry of Housing: *Cathy Come Home*, BBC WAC Ref: T5/695/1.

²⁶ BBC Audience Research Report for the repeat of *Cathy Come Home*, issued by the BBC Audience Research Department, 1 February 1967, BBC WAC Ref: T5/695/1.

housing lists and overcrowding.²⁴ The 'conscience of the nation' was simultaneously being regularly reminded of the human cost of these social ills by the face of Carol White (as Cathy) staring bleakly from the advertisements for Shelter, the newly-formed housing charity, which appeared the day after the repeat screening of the play, just weeks after its first transmission. Members of Parliament, having missed the broadcast, flocked to BBC Headquarters to see private viewings, while Garnett, Sandford and Loach were summoned to the Ministry of Housing on 1 December 1966 to be asked for their opinions about how to improve the housing situation. *Cathy Come Home* had now reached a level of social penetration and debate that could hardly be ignored by legislators, particularly when they had 'been given hell by their wives who had seen the programme and wanted to know what was being done about the homeless'.²⁵

Press comment on the play itself tended to split into two camps, the first raising all the familiar arguments about the 'dishonesty' of drama documentary as a form, the second focusing on the shock to the nation that the play had effected. But it was the pervasiveness of this coverage that mattered, since it forced the issue of homelessness in front of anyone who could read. That this Press activity had constructed a debate which ran parallel to the play itself, a debate which fed into and redefined its meaning, is proved by anomalies that the Audience Research Report reveals upon the repeat transmission of the play less than two months after its first screening (this speed was unprecedented). The Report records that the audience figure was estimated to be slightly higher for the repeat, with twenty-four per cent of the population watching as opposed to the original 23.6 per cent. Although this was unusual, what really intrigued the Research Department was the fact that the Reaction Index (indicating approval) had leapt from its first score of 78 to a massive 85, this constituting a 'most unusual phenomenon' since the Reaction Index was invariably the same for repeated transmissions. Further, negative responses to the play (in the 'C' and 'C-' categories) had halved from 6 to 3.

The Research Department immediately began to explore these startling figures in an effort to account for such increased approval on repeat screening. It asked the panel how many had seen the play on its first transmission and how many had seen it for the first time as a repeat, collated the results, and concluded that 'the *Cathy* repeat made a much greater impact than the origination [sic] not only on those who were seeing it for the second time, but also on those to whom it came freshly'. For the BBC researchers, there was just one viable explanation: 'It can only be concluded that the reactions of the repeat audience were influenced by the furore created by *Cathy* in November'.²⁶

A two-way text formation had therefore been effected whereby a television play had created a Press response and where that response had fed back into the evaluation of the repeat. In addition, the parallel

27 Letter from Jeremy Sandford to Gerald Savory, 26 October 1968, BBC WAC Ref: T5/695/1.

28 Tony Garnett interviewed on *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 6 November 1993.

29 Ken Loach interviewed on *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 6 November 1993.

text of Press comment had, by directing response, created a different play since reception had been conditioned favourably, causing the perceived faults in the 'original' to disappear. In some senses, then, the second showing of *Cathy Come Home* became a different 'social text' than the one which had been presented on 16 November 1966.

Garnett, Sandford and Loach had successfully intervened in social policy by the construction of a network of dialogues which converted 'drama' into 'news'. Unlike its interventionist predecessors, *Cathy Come Home* did seem likely to effect real change – at least at the level of consciousness and public feeling – having undermined the myth of affluence and having raised awareness of the social damage of homelessness. At the more material level, of course, though measures were taken to ease the crisis, all the figures suggest that the situation continued to deteriorate as the 1960s progressed. As Jeremy Sandford reported in October 1968, the figures for children taken into care by local authorities on the grounds of homelessness had risen by 1,000 in the two years since his play's first transmission, while the figure of 12,500 inhabitants of Part III Accommodation had leapt to 15,000.²⁷ Twenty-five years after the appearance of *Cathy Come Home*, Tony Garnett's grim verdict on the long-term effect of the play is that 'the people who were responsible for it live in nice houses'.²⁸

For Ken Loach, *Cathy Come Home* was a 'politicizing experience' because, despite the headlines and the uproar it caused, 'the Establishment just absorbed these protests and emerged intact'.²⁹ 'The Wednesday Play' had again made a dramatic intervention in social policy but again to no permanent effect. Garnett, MacTaggart and Loach had successfully appropriated the propaganda machine and launched their own version of 'truth' upon it, but, despite Corporation support, the message had evaporated into thin air. In the light of the relative 'failure' of this most famous example of interventionist drama, it became clear that television could, in fact, reach only a certain level of penetration even with a parallel text working in its interests: Establishment forces would always quickly reassert themselves and the transience of the television image (its defining characteristic) would do the rest.

The changes in social legislation that these five plays had demanded eventually came between 1968–9. Whether the material presented in 'The Wednesday Play' series can be connected with the shift in popular attitudes which made this legislation politically viable is a matter of some debate, though to maintain that there is no relationship at all would be an untenable position. Given the level of cultural penetration that television has enjoyed from the early 1960s, any movement in social consciousness cannot be dissociated from media involvement, particularly when a sustained agenda is consistently presented. MacTaggart, Garnett and Loach recognized this link and exploded the fraud of objectivity in the interests of intervention, creating as they did so channels of discourse which

converted 'drama' into 'news' through a dialogue between parallel texts.

More recently, comparable techniques have been employed particularly in the construction of solidarity formations around texts such as Alan Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff* (transmitted October 1982), or in the coalition between soap operas, media comment and social issues. But the connection was initially made by the producers and directors of 'The Wednesday Play', who were the first to realize that 'television drama has only properly occurred, been thoroughly realized, when the plots and moral messages they contain have been discussed and interpreted and re-dramatized'.³⁰ The controversies surrounding the plays discussed here, then, were orchestrated discursive strategies manipulated to force debate and initiate change. But while plays such as *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* redefined the function of television drama, they simultaneously exposed the limits of intervention.

³⁰ Laurie Taylor and Bob Mullan, *Uninvited Guests: the Intimate Secrets of Television and Radio* (London: Coronet Books, 1987), p. 206.

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Transforming television broadcasting in a democratic South Africa

JACQUELINE MAINGARD

The euphoria of the first democratic elections in 1994 has given way to a new intensity of purpose to rebuild and reconstruct our nation. To describe the sense of a country that is transforming itself in every sphere is very difficult, but it is crucial to attempt something of this since it is within this sense of overall transformation that I am examining television broadcasting. While this transformation, even revolution, is all pervasive, the basic human needs of the majority of South Africans are paramount, especially with regard to health, education, employment and housing. Apartheid has left a legacy of destruction and devastation in all these areas. Government programmes to address this are being put in place, but it is taking time for the changes to be felt in everyday life. In addition, the legacy of apartheid must also be measured in psychological terms, both individually and as a nation, an issue which the recently established Truth Commission is seeking to address. At the opening of the first Truth Commission sitting, head of the Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu made this comment: 'We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past . . . that it may . . . contribute to the healing of a traumatized nation; for all of us in South Africa are wounded people.'¹ Within this melange of a celebration of the democratic future and a knowledge of our woundedness, I wish to bring together a number of elements for analysis: issues which may point towards some possibilities or new strategies of representation in television;

¹ *Weekly Mail and Guardian*,
19–25 April 1996, p. 5.

indeed, which may take into account, and account for, the multiple identities and subjectivities that are experienced in my country.

The first of these elements is a brief consideration of the ways in which television, specifically the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as the national television broadcaster, has wrenched itself free from the apartheid State, transforming itself within the processes of negotiation towards democracy in the early 1990s, and even further by the work of the Independent Broadcasting Authority established within these processes of negotiation.

The second element is to note the documentary programmes which have been broadcast nationally in the 1990s, since campaigns for access to the national broadcaster have made it increasingly possible for progressive political movements and filmmakers to have their work represented on the television screen, and more recently to have their work commissioned by the SABC. But more important for my purposes, is to analyse closely and critically some of these documentaries on the basis of their strategies of representation, especially in relation to questions of identity. Specifically, I will examine two history series which were made by collective groups of what I would loosely identify as anti-apartheid filmmakers from the 1980s: the first series is called *Ulibambe Lingashoni: Hold Up the Sun* (1994), a five-part series representing the history of the African National Congress (ANC); the second is called *Soweto: a History* (1994).

The third element is theoretical enquiry. In examining strategies of representation in documentary films broadcast nationally on television, especially with regard to questions of identity and subjectivity, I am concerned to discover conceptual means of thinking about identity in a democratic South Africa – and to do this in a way that is not static or definitive, but in a way that allows for the fluidity of the experience of identity and its formation within this new democracy.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation

In relation to western countries it is interesting to note that television is a recently acquired pleasure in South Africa (or, in terms of apartheid history, a propaganda tool). It was only established in 1976, and then only after heated debates in Parliament about its usefulness to the State. There is now a more diverse broadcasting environment in South Africa than the SABC alone – a single, State-owned and controlled national broadcaster. The SABC itself, however, has undergone major and significant transformations in recent years. These were sparked off by the demonstrations of a coalition of anti-apartheid film and media organizations and unions which marched on the SABC to proclaim that ‘the people shall broadcast’, and to claim publicly the right of access to the national broadcaster. At the same time, we

engaged in carefully strategized and orchestrated moves to present detailed proposals of the transformations in television which needed to precede the first democratic election, precisely to make that election free and fair. Since television was State-owned and controlled, its potential use primarily for the election campaign of the National Party was a serious threat to the validity of the elections. This had the effect of placing on the political agenda of the multi-party negotiations of the early 1990s the significance of the media in representing the aspirations of the citizens of the nation. The Campaign for Independent Broadcasting – formed by a broader coalition which included the umbrella trade union body COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) and progressive political groupings like the South African Communist Party, the ANC and the South African Council of Churches – finally pressured the State into establishing a new SABC Board. It was nominated and elected (on largely democratic lines, although the then State President F.W. de Klerk was inevitably heavy-handed in the process), and by May 1993 the Board was in place, just one year before the elections, and structures were created for the appointment of new top management and staff. In addition, through these various political campaigns to wrest the national broadcaster from the control of the State, intensive debates, discussions and consultations brought about agreement by broad-based film, media, political and labour bodies on legislative proposals which would redefine broadcasting in our country for the new democracy. This led to the writing and promulgation of a new Act of Parliament which defined the terms for the establishment of an Independent Broadcasting Authority to regulate broadcasting, and served effectively to diminish State power and control over broadcasting. The first important point, then, in establishing a context for analysis concerns the general political transformations which have shaped the broadcasting environment for a democratic future.

The second important point is to note some of the specifics of the new legislation and their implications. The Act defines broadcasting as functioning to entertain, inform and educate within three areas: public, private and community broadcasting. It emphasizes both the public interest or public needs and the necessity of opening the airwaves through the provision of a diverse range of services, which should cater for all languages and cultural groups. In South Africa there are eleven official languages. Their recognition by Act of Parliament further entrenches the responsibilities of broadcasters both in terms of advancing linguistic democracy and in terms of safeguarding the rights of those whose languages have been disregarded in the past. The Act also makes two further significant provisions pertaining especially to the legacy of apartheid: the first of these is that broadcasting should be regulated to encourage ownership and control by persons from historically disadvantaged groups, and the second is to ensure that broadcasting services are not controlled by foreigners. These sweeping

provisions have paved the way for major transformations that have taken place within the broadcasting environment in general, and in television (especially the national broadcaster) in particular.

The third important point is the outcome of the Inquiry held by the Independent Broadcasting Authority. In terms of its parliamentary mandate, the IBA conducted an Inquiry into three specific areas of broadcasting – public service broadcasting, local content regulation and cross-media control – in the context of ‘the identified national goals of democracy, development and nation-building’.² My focus here is on the local content aspect of the Inquiry, since it has specific implications for the ability of locally made productions to gain access to the national broadcaster. In terms of the IBA’s recommendations, the national broadcaster will within three years be required substantially to increase its local content quota to fifty per cent overall within the broadcast period of 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. – important that this local content cannot be relegated to very late night and early morning slots. Specifically local drama productions will increase from 9.2 per cent to twenty per cent, local documentary productions from 3.5 per cent to fifty per cent, as well as local children’s programming.³ The scene is thus set for major advances in representations of South African issues on the national broadcaster and, therefore, for representations of South African identities and subjectivities.

The fourth important point is to identify the issues which arise from a critical evaluation of these recent transformations. Here there are a number of issues that need to be problematized arising from the final recommendations of the IBA and the subsequent wide changes to the SABC’s programming: for example, in relation to local content on questions of quality versus quantity, and on the inadequate financial bases upon which these proposals have been made. There is also a lack of clarity in the various categories,⁴ and in the wording of certain recommendations which ‘encourage’ rather than ‘require’ certain changes to be effected. These changes include the commissioning of programmes from black independent producers, and the move to prevent the establishment of commercial television stations until 1998: a move which limits competition, but offers some initial protection to the national broadcaster with a view to establishing a baseline tradition of higher quality programmes.

It would be a project in itself to elaborate further on these critical points, but it is important to note here, however briefly, that there are indeed a number of serious concerns affecting the transformation of the broadcasting environment on the basis of democratic principles which are perhaps more obliquely than directly apparent, and perhaps only apparent to those who have a professional interest in analysing the transformative process in television. To attempt this here is too detailed a task, but further critical analysis would examine recent newspaper comment on the high salary packages of IBA councillors and so-called ‘extravagances’; complaints by independent producers

2 Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Triple Enquiry Report* (1995), p. 25.

3 Ibid., pp. 91–2.

4 For example, in the Report the category of ‘documentary’ is actually called ‘documentary and informal knowledge building’.

about funding and scheduling issues for local content programmes; allegations, on the one hand, of the IBA's protectionist attitude towards the SABC as far as commercialization is concerned, and the possibility, on the other hand, of tensions between the IBA and the SABC.

In addition, in the reshuffle of cabinet posts in the first half of 1996, President Nelson Mandela removed Pallo Jordan as Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting and appointed, in his place, Jay Naidoo, former Minister without Portfolio, and Head of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (now disbanded). Shortly afterwards, in his first major policy speech, Jay Naidoo reported that the IBA would from now on focus on regulating broadcasting rather than drawing up broadcasting policy. The question to be asked is whether this is a way in which the State – albeit the new democratic state – will now reclaim jurisdiction over the broadcasting environment and influence its direction. On the one hand, this is to be welcomed within the broader restructuring imperatives of the new State, and especially in terms of the commitment to address, in Jay Naidoo's words, 'the traditional imbalances in the development of the telecommunications services . . . by the establishment of a reliable network that will reach both rural and urban communities [for the] provision of universal services'.⁵ There is a vast rural/urban divide, with about only fifty per cent of the population, mostly concentrated in urban areas, with access to television. The advancement of a broadly based telecommunications policy framework is to be welcomed. On the other hand, the legacy of the apartheid State's control of the SABC, which included decisions on programme content, raises serious questions about processes for maintaining an independent broadcasting sector.

The key factor within this discussion of broadcasting questions is the fact that the ground has been laid for much greater representation of local content on television in South Africa. This means that many more local productions will be produced and commissioned for television. In such a context, critical analyses of locally made productions in relation to their strategies of representation become crucial – particularly with regard to questions of identity and subjectivity.

Re-presenting apartheid history

I propose now to discuss two locally produced history series: the first a history of the ANC, and the second a history of Soweto. My choice of these two series is informed both by the broader sense of the nation in transformation, and by the significance for a new democracy of the representation of history and the past. Given the apartheid State's heavy reliance on propaganda, censorship, information bannings and

6 Here it is important to note that an outcry from the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party after the first part of the ANC history series was broadcast before the elections in 1994, led to the decision by the SABC to broadcast the remaining parts after the elections. While there was a sense that this was a most unfair decision on the part of the national broadcaster, especially given the monopoly of the airwaves enjoyed by the National Party since the inception of television, it shows how strongly this history series was perceived as a history of the ANC rather than the more broadly based history it seems to want to embrace.

silencings, representations of history are even more significant. I am, of course, mindful of the issues around questions of truth and reality in documentary film, on which I will not elaborate here, except to say that histories of the kind I am describing are both set up and set themselves up as a more truthful account of the past than has previously been available on television. And there is a certain *felt* sense in which they are.⁶

I will begin with the ANC history, *Ulibambe Lingashoni: Hold Up the Sun. The ANC and Popular Power in the Making*. A statement from the producers (on the video cover) says that 'the series is a record of the resistance against apartheid by the masses of South Africans. It reveals . . . the rich tapestry of South African history.' This identifies it as a history of both the ANC and of South Africa, and also of the making of popular power. Simply on the level of the title there is an already defined sense of the series as the new official history of the country, of apartheid and of its resistance. This can be contrasted with the Soweto history, called *Soweto: a History*, a title which suggests that this is one of many possible histories rather than closing the text off as the definitive truth.

The ANC history is a five-episode series, each episode running for fifty-two minutes, beginning with an episode entitled 'The Roots of Struggle: 1912–1948'. This is a significant period to represent as the 'roots' of popular power, since it was in 1948 that the National Party came into power and established the apartheid State. The remaining four parts cover the next forty years in episodes which coincide with historical developments under the apartheid regime: these are 'Enter the Masses: 1949–1958', 'Submit or Fight: 1958–1969', 'The New Generation: 1968–1983' and 'Not the Kings and Generals: 1983–1990'.

The Soweto history is in three episodes with two parts in each. The first episode starts in Johannesburg 1900 with 'Building Matchbox City', covering the early history up until the 1950s, followed by 'Divide and Rule' which examines the entrenching of white Johannesburg and black Soweto after the National Party came to power in the 1950s. The next episode covers 'Making the Best of the Worst', focusing on the 1960s and 1970s and 'This is Our Day' which mostly represents the historic events of 16 June 1976 when Soweto scholars demonstrated en masse against Afrikaans being the medium of instruction and sparked off a new wave of revolutionary action. The third episode in its first part, 'By War: the Era of the Comrades' marks the period of the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, and, in its second, 'Endbeginnings', traces the period from the mid 1980s to the eve of the election in 1994.

Both histories, then, cover approximately the same period of time: from 1900 to 1994; from the basis in colonialism to the particular form it developed within South African society – apartheid. Both histories are made by anti-apartheid filmmakers whom one knows to

have a progressive view of South African history, and who would therefore be concerned to represent the resistance to apartheid. Indeed, resistance is a theme of both series. Both histories were produced at approximately the same time: in the early 1990s after the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, during multi-party negotiations, and just prior to the first democratic election. And finally, both series have similar stylistic features: footage from interviews mixed with archival photographs and film images or sequences, using explanatory, informational voiceover narration.

But there are significant differences in both form and content which touch on questions of the representation of identity and subjectivity. The strongest point of comparison is perhaps the inclusion in *Soweto: a History* of conflicts, both historically and in the present, between migrant workers living in so-called single-sex hostels and those people living in family houses in Soweto. In more recent times this conflict has escalated into war between Inkatha (whose membership is largely drawn from rural KwaZulu-Natal and Zulu migrant workers from this region) and ANC groups. In the ANC history this war and the conflicts which gave rise to it, as well as the role of the State in fuelling the war, is hardly mentioned. This is a complex war (as all wars presumably are) but in the making of a comprehensive history series for television which presents itself as a history of 'popular power in the making', the exclusion of such a significant and critical part of South African history must be examined.

The makers of the ANC history were largely working in a collective called Video News Services in the 1980s and early 1990s. The collective functioned to represent the anti-apartheid struggle on video for the masses of workers, youth and community organizations through the anti-apartheid network within the United Democratic Front, a broad-based anti-apartheid alliance established in 1983. Much of this work focused on and promoted the concept of 'unity'. If conflicts within the resistance movement were represented it was always within the context of the power of the masses presented as those within the ANC-aligned movement. The issue here is not that this was necessarily incorrect, nor that these videos fail to represent the aspirations of the majority of South Africans. What is important is that the reality of South African experience, despite the outcome of the general election, is that there are indeed pockets of civil war which are still largely unexplained – at least for the television-watching public. Identity, in other words, and the subjective experience of everyday life is for many people not as singular and unitary as the ANC history series proposes.

Soweto: a History, on the other hand, creates a strong sense of the conflicts – first between migrant workers brought into Soweto to live in hostels and the broader community, and later in the aftermath of the 1976 protest by scholars. The escalation into war between Inkatha and the ANC is also represented – and it is important to note that these

depictions are very complex in themselves. In comparison, then, the exclusion of this area of history in the ANC series is disturbing.

Perhaps the theme in *Soweto: a History* which can be set against the unitary theme of the ANC history is that of 'community'. Almost from the start of the series the idea of 'community spirit' is strongly represented. The counter-theme of the divisions created by apartheid and its legislation, and the on-going desperate attempts of the apartheid State to entrench divisions is therefore all the more powerful. But so, also, is the power of the 1976 protests against the Afrikaans medium being used for black education. Here the point is made that the scholars came together as one mass body, despite the fact that schools were divided on ethnic lines.

As well as these thematic contrasts, there are also differences of style: for example, with regard to the status and style of the interviews. While on the face of it both series have used similar stylistic strategies, on closer examination the interview style of the ANC history associates the representation of its history with male leaders of the ANC, dressed in business suits and ties, whose mode of address is mostly to speak in objective overtones about the events being represented. Add to this the fact that the voiceover narration is the voice of John Kani, a well-known black actor and theatre personality. So the representation of this apparently 'rich tapestry of South African history' is very much male-dominated, observational and middle class.

It is interesting to note, however, where and how this overall format changes, which has the effect of both highlighting it, yet also revealing its limitations. This is when women, either leaders of the ANC or allied organizations, or participants in various resistances, are interviewed, occupying the frame and using the opportunity to voice their perspectives in a different way to the suited men of the ANC. For example, Ama Naidoo, referred to as a 'passive resistance volunteer', describes the month she spent in prison in terms of the pain it caused her as a mother leaving her eighteen-month-old son. She says: 'when I came back . . . he didn't want to come to me. I felt very hurt but on the other hand I was very proud because I'm not sorry I went to jail, because . . . it's for a good thing we went, isn't it?' The rhetorical question is followed by a shy laugh, it is not answered, and here the viewer is drawn in to answer in the affirmative. The viewer is interpellated into the ideological statement of the film through the rhetorical moment. In relation to the overall didactic representation of history, however, this moment and others like it stand out as ones that engage the viewer in more human terms than any of the words or presentations of those presented as leaders, leaders in the know. Especially since Ms Naidoo seems uncertain of the value of her effort.

Soweto: a History, on the other hand, embraces a strong witness/participant orientation in its interviews. Every interviewee is identified



**The leaders – men in suits –
frame history in Ulibambe
Lingashoni: Hold Up the Sun**



**Representing the personalized
self – one of the few women
speaking in Ulibambe
Lingashoni: Hold Up the Sun**

by a subtitle, and there is no differentiation between leaders of the ANC and ordinary people. Everybody is apparently ordinary – ‘photographs are democratic’ says Susan Sontag. All interviewees are equal in this documentary series. Stronger than witness/participants, the interviewees are perhaps more appropriately defined as ‘speaking subjects’ – people who were there – so they are speaking about, voicing, sometimes even enacting, events and experiences with gestures. This seems to highlight their subjective perspectives. The choice of interviewees itself covers a wide range of people, which includes some political leaders, but seems on the surface to be an almost random choice of people. The presence of women on the screen is in strong contrast to the male-dominated ANC series. Indeed the very first interviewee is a woman. Added to this, the voiceover narration is that of a black woman, a well-known singer, Sibongile Khumalo. Identity in this series, however, is neither defined nor represented predominantly on the basis of gender, but is rather a mix of identities based on race, gender, age, ethnicity, place, employment, position and political activism. It is textured and complex in its presentation.

What is lacking is a more nuanced sense of history than is explicated in both series. History is not solely composed of the master narratives that have become entrenched with hindsight. It is also composed of smaller but intensely significant events. Here it is significant that there are concerns re-emerging in South African historiography about histories now being written on the basis of reconstructed master narratives.

In this connection, it is valuable to consider how, for example, in the Soweto series the first episode devotes a great deal of space to James Mpanza who in the 1940s played a major role in expanding Soweto by developing squatter areas where the State had ceased to provide housing. On the other hand, more recent moves to wrest control of housing by residents themselves are not represented. These included the large groups of women who organized themselves, in tandem with civic organizations in Soweto, to occupy vacant land. Similarly, the significance for gay and lesbian rights in Soweto of the ‘coming out’ of political activist, and former treason trialist (under the apartheid State), Simon Nkoli, along with others in Soweto, is something that the series chooses not to mention.

Questions of sexuality, however, are not completely ignored. Firstly, the allusion to the mixing of all races in ghettos in the early 1900s, and how this ‘offended the segregationist ideals of those in power’, as stated in the voiceover narration, is significant here. Secondly, the representations of ideas about migrant workers and how they were perceived within Soweto are also significant. To provide some detail here: one of the interviewees indicates that the urban/rural divide was evident in the ways the urban Soweto dwellers talked about migrant workers denoting their rural-ness; another interviewee states that ‘most

of the parents around here didn't like the idea of us boys going into the hostel. There was that rumour the men in the hostel are sexually abusing boys here from the township for money.' He goes on to describe how they used to call these men *isiqhaza*, a word with connotations derived from the very large earrings they wore in their ears and derogatorily associated with homosexuality by urban township dwellers. So there is a complex mix here of urban and rural identities, and perceptions of these, with sexual and ethnic identities. In the sequence where this is represented, black-and-white photographs are used as illustrations of migrant workers dressed in hybrid ways that combine their rural and ethnic icons with urban and sexualized styles: in one photograph a man is depicted holding a small handbag, usually associated with women. What is interesting from the perspective of questions of subjectivity is that the comments are made not by migrant workers themselves but by the so-called urban dwellers. This might suggest that the subjectivities of migrant workers are not adequately considered; yet the illustrative photographs which are shot direct to camera have the effect of representing the 'voice' of the migrant workers – *isiqhaza* – themselves. The filmmaker chooses to accentuate the relationship between the migrant worker being photographed and the icons which define his multiple identities by firstly representing the handbag in a closeup and then zooming out to a midshot of the man who is holding it. There is a certain pride evident which serves to represent the point of view of the person being photographed despite the fact that he does not speak words as an interviewee. The representation of this aspect of Soweto's history is, then, textured and complex.



Moments of revelation in
Soweto: a History – the
feminized migrant worker as
'speaking subject'.

A similar pattern emerges around representations of sexual harassment and, in particular, of rape, but the resolution of these lacks the sophistication described above and therefore seems roughly concluded. Here again some detail is helpful: the sequence begins with the voiceover narration contextualizing the formation of township gangs in relation to education and the fact that so many young people were out of school in the late 1950s. The so-called '*tsotsi* gangs' (*tsotsi* meaning township criminal) that formed drew their membership from this group. Here there is strong representation in the form of a woman, Susan Shabangu, talking forcefully about how these *tsotsi* gangs harassed women going to school. Then an interviewee who was obviously once, and possibly still is, a gangster describes how women who were abducted 'if you were nice . . . didn't accuse you of force'. Susan Shabangu then speaks again about her fear: ' . . . if I refuse them they are just going to stab me . . .', and then the gangster speaks again: 'Rape', he says, 'well it was bad. Five guys would sleep with one girl . . . but at least they didn't kill her. They just wanted sex. They'd never slit the girl's throat.' Over the last sentences we hear an ominous beating sound which we realize in the next shot is actually the sound of a train seen travelling at high speed from right to left of

frame silhouetted against a setting sun. There is a sound mix here which creates a menacing effect. As the image of the train cuts to a black-and-white shot of two gangsters in medium closeup, the one looking at the other with a sinister grin, the sound of a train stopping is mixed with a high-pitched screeching sound. This sound mix ends abruptly with a dissolve into a second black-and-white shot, signalling an end to the sequence on sexual harassment and rape.

What is unresolved here – and therefore remains disturbing – is that apart from the words of Susan Shabangu there is very little to counteract the words of the gangster. The choice of shots and sound seems to be jerky and unclear, which produces a confused and confusing sequence. Rather than contextualizing the sequence in relation to experiences of women in Soweto, what the filmmaker opts for is a contextualization in sociopolitical terms. The next sequence deals with violence and the community's fears of violence. The narrator makes the point that the authorities seemed unconcerned about crime and that there were only three police stations for a city of over a million people. This is followed by a sequence about the community's attempt at policing itself, with Susan Shabangu commenting that it had failed.

The remainder of this episode is represented in male and racial terms – it proceeds to discuss the popularity of soccer in Soweto. After this there is a break between sequences with a long shot of houses and a narrational commentary that 'people were making the best of the worst but family and community life were suffering under apartheid'. The video then describes the insidious reference book or pass book system which controlled the movements of black people, but it is represented in terms of what it did to the 'fathers' of the community: 'you find your father acting like a boy', says one of the interviewees. From here we hear how black men saw white men as lords. Graffiti depicting 'Black Power' is used to begin a sequence describing how youth changed this with the advent of black consciousness. The sequence and this episode ends with a poetry recital by Ingoapele Madingoane, a well-known black-consciousness poet. The poem he performs invokes Africa as a mythic space – 'Africa my beginning, Africa my ending' – but of greater concern is the repeated motif invoking the male to 'Behold! My son behold!' and the representation of 'man's anger' as being the excess that will liberate. The excesses of men as gangsters and rapists have been transformed into the excesses of men as liberators. Women as victims/survivors, and women as co-liberators are effectively excluded.



The poet, Ingoapele Madingoane, speaks to the 'sons of Africa' in Soweto: a History.

Identity and subjectivity

My critique of these two series is strongly influenced by my research and inquiry into theoretical perspectives on identity and subjectivity.

7 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema', in Michael Chanan (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years of the New Latin American Cinema* (London: British Film Institute/Channel Four, 1983).

8 I do not wish to give an incorrect perspective of the papers presented in this conference – for example, by people from India – but for my purposes here I am highlighting the placement of the concept in a First World geographical and theoretical location.

9 Teshome Gabriel, 'Third Cinema as guardian of popular memory: towards a third aesthetics', in Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema*, (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p. 61.

These are mostly located within film theory, specifically in relation to Third Cinema and documentary film. The elaboration of these areas of film theory in the South African context is valuable since it may suggest ways in which, in their application within the complex world of a southern nation, theory which has been elaborated elsewhere is lacking. It may seem odd to propose such an idea, especially since Third Cinema is a concept that originated in the southern hemisphere with a 1969 paper by two Latin American filmmakers and theorists Solanas and Getino: 'Towards a Third Cinema'.⁷ More recent reformulations of the concept within the West/North, especially some of those emerging from the Third Cinema conference held in Edinburgh in 1986, attempted to relocate the concept within a broader conceptualization of a Third space. In that instance, the reference was predominantly to the emergence in the 1980s of black cinema in Britain, but it included also the cinema of the black diaspora in the USA and elsewhere.⁸

The debates which were published in the journal *Framework* after the conference, and in the book published in association with the conference, *Questions of Third Cinema*, include crucially important ideas about Third Cinema. These need to be discussed especially with regard to theoretical elaborations on identity within the South, and specifically here within South Africa. It is useful to begin here by noting a split in the conference between those who sought to perceive the concept of Third Cinema within the black diaspora from what has been called a 'populist' perspective, and those who perceive Third Cinema from an 'eclectic' perspective. The names of Clyde Taylor, Teshome Gabriel and Haile Gerima have been associated with the 'populist' perspective. For example in a blistering critique of what he calls the 'structuralist-semiotic impulse' Gabriel suggests that 'what is central to mainstream criticism [is] only to address the text . . . separating the work from its social context. This minimalizes and diffuses the political nature of the text and, therefore, allies itself with official histories'.⁹

On the other hand, in his paper 'The commitment to theory'.¹⁰ Homi Bhabha attempts both to incorporate this perspective, or rather the sentiments which give rise to it, and to refute it. It is to this paper that I will now turn, because the concept of 'hybridity' which Bhabha proposes here, 'rescuing' it from its biological roots and turning it most advantageously to an examination of the role of western theory, has significant resonances for questions of identity in the South African context. But it is important also to consider that in proposing 'hybridity' as a useful concept he achieves a fascinating turnaround of Third Cinema, or at least of the concept 'Third'.

In his delineation of the role of western criticism and theory he proposes that it is the 'inbetween' or 'entre' that is significant. This is based on an essentially Lacanian analysis where the 'I' of enunciation and the 'I' of that which is enounced are not the same. So critical

engagement of, or from, the 'inbetween' of these two positions – the one unconscious, the other conscious – enables criticism to be unfixed in time, fluid, always at the cutting edge of social and political issues and contexts. Criticism viewed in this way inhabits what Bhabha calls a Third Space. But – and this is the turnaround – this is not the geographically or ideologically identified Third Space of Third Cinema: while the sign 'Third' looks the same, its derivations and significations are not. This is a Third Space derived from the almost intangible, almost uninhabitable space of the 'inbetween', which at the same time is tangible and habitable *just enough* – or to put it slightly differently, is felt, sensed, imaginable *just enough* – to be in some form identified.

What has this to do with questions of identity in the South African experience, and, in particular, with representations of identity on television? On the one hand, the notion of hybridity is seductive because it proposes a sense of neither One nor the Other, an inbetween of Self and Other, which in the South African context usefully blurs the strongly defined categories with which the nation has been dominated in the colonial and apartheid eras: in racial terms particularly – black/white – but also in other terms – boss/worker, oppressed/oppressor, and so on. This is not to suggest that these stark divisions need to be suppressed, for I believe they neither can nor should be. What I wish to propose, rather, is that while there needs to be recognition and representation of the divisions in their stark form, more nuanced inbetween-nesses also need to be acknowledged and represented. I would argue that even Bhabha's conceptualization of the inbetween may still too strongly promote a dualistic or binary perspective on identity. What is needed is a concept of identity in theoretical terms that not so much draws from two positions into a Third Space or entre, but rather allows for even greater multiplicities. In this way, the inhabitation of multiple spaces of identity and subjectivity may become possible.

Contemporary developments within documentary film theory are insightful on this issue, especially in the work of those who look towards visual anthropology. Bill Nichols, for example, has proposed in his most recent book the addition of a mode of documentary film called 'performative documentary' to those he had previously delineated. This mode of documentary identifies documentaries made from within the inhabited spaces of embodied subjective experience. Here the paper in *Questions of Third Cinema* by Trinh T. Minh-ha, called 'Outside in inside out', is relevant. In a poetic rendition of subjectivity she writes that

'the moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside . . . she refuses to

reduce herself to an Other, and her reflections to a mere outsider's objective reasoning or insider's subjective feeling'¹⁰

So here we have a different description of the inbetween or entre – insider outsider, self other – with no slash between. We are not concerned with either the one position or the other, what is here or there, but rather that space inbetween from which or within which both are inhabitable and both can be represented. To add further complexity to this I would argue that we are not only in one space of inbetween-ness, but that we are always in multi-layered spaces of inbetween-nesses. To tie this up with the televisual representations of history that I have dealt with in this paper: the representation of the part of the history of Soweto which identifies the multiple identifying frameworks of migrant workers might be seen as beginning the work of inhabiting and representing this type of complex inbetween-ness.

My concern in this paper has been to identify, and also in some senses to isolate, three elements for critical analysis from a South African perspective: transformations in the broadcasting environment, especially in the national public broadcaster; a comparative study of two history series recently produced for television; and a theoretical inquiry into questions of identity. Overall my concern is with those representations of identity and subjectivity which show consideration for, and reveal multiple perspectives on, South African realities and experiences. My critique of the series shows that the ANC history is almost entirely male-dominated and therefore limited in its representations not only of both sides of a binary view of identity but more especially of multiple and complex perspectives. The history of Soweto is, on the other hand, complex and layered, but in an inconsistent way. Without overstating the critical points I have noted, and within the context of applauding the work of progressive filmmakers in revisualizing South African history, both representations are to different degrees, and in different ways, diminished accounts of the histories they seek to represent in the context of representations of identities.

Delving into theoretical framings of identity and subjectivity in contemporary film theory reveals a need for theory, when located geographically or ideologically in a southern space (or specifically in South Africa itself), to be freed, liberated from both essentialist categorizations of identity and from extended categorizations that maintain a limited binarism. How this liberation is to come about is not yet clear – except to say that solutions lie in nuance, in complexity, in fluidity, in acts of unfixing, in the inhabiting of those spaces of identity and subjectivity that are available to all of us, but which we fear to enter. Yet in entering them, embodying them, we are more able to represent them and free them from restrictive and limited definitions inherited from our pasts.

Some combination or integration of the three elements I have outlined here seems necessary if we are to understand both the possibilities for, and the limitations on, transforming television broadcasting in a democratic South Africa. The structural basis for major increases in productions of local content, despite changes still to be developed, is in place. Transformations are needed in local-content productions themselves, so that they consider and represent multiple and complex renditions of South African realities. Programmes which have been put in place for developing access to film and television education and training, thereby opening up possibilities for those who have been impeded by apartheid, will begin to make a difference. At the same time, however, contemporary experiences, as well as historical ones, conceptualizations of identity and subjectivity, realities of everyday life, the woundedness of the nation, whether individually or collectively, tell us that we are in neither one position nor the other, nor indeed in only one space of inbetween-ness, but that we are always in multi-layered spaces of inbetween-nesses. New strategies for the representation of the complexities of South African identities give meaning to the democracy for which we have fought and won, and opens up the possibilities of future democracies.

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debate:

Piano recital

ANNIE GOLDSON

The Piano has generated a significant published dialogue – the majority of it not from the country it purports to represent. This article focuses on the reception of *The Piano* in New Zealand by both Maori and Pakeha, a reception that was at best uneasy.¹ My intention here is to analyse this uneasiness, my argument being that the film itself, and most of the critical dialogue, was produced by ex-patriate New Zealanders and non-New Zealanders and, as a consequence, could not take into account specific developments in the sociopolitical climate within this country. In examining this uneasiness, I think it is possible to raise broader questions about the reception of filmic images of nationalism within the nation itself, particularly when the film text appears orientated towards a ‘global’ (that is, US and European) marketplace.

The Piano was released during a year when New Zealand’s reputation as a film culture reached new heights. When the film went on to receive the Palme d’Or at Cannes, the reaction here was understandably one of pride. Jane Campion, a New Zealand woman, could join Sir Edmund Hillary, Jonah Lomu and, for some of us, Len Lye; all Kiwi notables proving that although New Zealand might be small we can compete with the best.

Our Film Commission is funded largely through the Lotteries Board. Its output is small, its future always shaky. New Zealand’s economic ‘revolution’ – the introduction of a market-driven economy

¹ *Pakeha* is a term used to describe descendants from colonial settlers, who were primarily of Anglo-Celtic origins. It means ‘outsider’ in Maori.

into a country traditionally structured through public service and the welfare state – has put any activity incapable of turning a large profit on the chopping block. *The Piano*, along with that season's crop of films, *Once Were Warriors* and *Heavenly Creatures* appeared to put New Zealand film on the map. The films' economic and critical successes helped shore up an industry that constantly feels vulnerable. In fact *The Piano* functions well in the economic climate of the 1990s. Bearing the hallmark of an art film – the signature of the director – the film nonetheless delivers the emotional impact of a popular melodrama. Hence it offers up a contemporary blend, the art film that succeeds at the multiplex.

Yet for all its international reputation and the positive judgements of its aesthetic, technical and commercial merit, there are other considerations: how the film intersects with, reflects on and shapes interpretations of New Zealand's culture and history. In fact, for New Zealanders *The Piano* offers us a paradox: it is a 'historical' film yet, in its representation of our history, it generates heat around two very contemporary issues – feminism and Maori/Pakeha relations.

When the shock and pleasure of Campion's success had worn off, the rumblings around these issues began. New Zealand, because of its size and a pragmatic, rather than intellectual, culture offers little in the way of a critical forum for film. Hence, commentaries on *The Piano* were heard mostly in informal settings – at dinner parties, in university lectures, in popular magazines, and in Letters to the Editor.

One overarching issue that subsumed the others was the question of the film's national identity. Miramax, *The Piano*'s distributor, had successfully packaged the film as a story about New Zealand 'history' and landscape. Campion herself was sure of its national identity, stating in an article in *NZ Film*, 'It's a film made in New Zealand by New Zealanders and it's very obviously a New Zealand film'.² At the time, however, the general public here did not share Campion's certainty about the film's identity. A number of practical objections were voiced, from the poetic licence it took with our landscape, to the film's lack of New Zealand stars and its director's expatriate status, through to its questionable representation of Maori.

Linked to this discomfort over identity was the public knowledge that there had been a film in development by the New Zealand Film Commission, based on the book, *The Story of a New Zealand River*.³ This novel, published in 1920, was written by the New Zealand author, Jane Mander. It too involved a love triangle, a strong mother–daughter relationship, and a piano (which, rather than being deposited on a beach, was ferried up a river). The script based on *The Story of a New Zealand River* was dropped after *The Piano* received its funding from a French company. The NZFC recognized that the world market would not bear two films both involving pianos and the colonial history of New Zealand. Although no legal action was taken and no formal allegations made, *The Piano* script, written more than seventy

2 Campion quoted in *NZ Film*, no. 50. (October 1993).

3 Jane Mander, *The Story of a New Zealand River* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1938).

years after Mander's book was published, bore strong similarities to it.

The use of the land and landscape in *The Piano* provoked considerable discussion in this country. The landscape is central to New Zealand identity, shaping our literary and visual art traditions. Europe might have Culture, but New Zealand has Nature – the bush, the sea, the fjords and the mountains. Behind what some might judge as an essentialist and romantic attachment lie important historical determinants. For Maori, the land is intricately tied up with *whakapapa* and *turangawaewae*, their family line, ancestry and their determination to 'have a place to stand'. Pakeha, too, have deep emotional ties to place. Our nineteenth-century forebears, many of them middle- and lower-middle-class British stock, could never have owned property in the 'home country'. It was this possibility of owning land that functioned as a lure, marking the formation of New Zealand as a settler colony.

That *The Piano* could scramble our landscape, mixing various vegetations and even birdsongs with impunity, was remarked upon frequently. Although some allowed Campion her artistic interpretations, the compulsion to obey the demands of narrative seemed to hurt. Perhaps the attitude that privileged 'art' over 'truth' fed into an increasing discomfort that many New Zealanders are feeling as their landscape is packaged and sold as a location. Tourism and particularly 'adventure tourism', such as bungee-jumping and the like, has become a major source of revenue. In addition, the images of a 'clean, green New Zealand' are used to encourage foreign investment and ownership. The issue of foreign ownership is a highly emotive one, responsible in part for the shape of the new coalition Government, elected in late 1996.⁴

The marketing of the land has also been aimed at the international film industry. Because of the southern hemisphere seasons and the geological variations within the country, New Zealand is being used by overseas film companies as a generic location. Currently, two television series, *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*, US reworkings of 'classical' myths, are being filmed on the West Coast beaches of Auckland, near Karekare, the beach that figured in *The Piano*. *Jurassic Park 2* was planning to have a few scenes shot in Fjordland in the South Island. There are positive aspects to these activities: they generate some overseas capital and they offer short term employment to our film industry. But these large-scale productions smack of cultural domination and a general disregard for the local, which leaves a lingering sense of resentment.

Although a very different film, *The Piano* obeyed similar institutional directives to the works cited above. No New Zealand investment went into the film, and none of its profits (except for wages paid to New Zealand technicians, caterers and so on) came back. Also commented on frequently by New Zealanders was the ex-patriate status of the director, and indeed the lack of New Zealand

4 Under MMP (proportional representation), New Zealand First, the party that came third, held the balance of power and has formed a coalition government with the National Party. NZF campaigned on foreign ownership, asset sales and immigration policy issues.

'stars' in the film. Sam Neill, born in Ireland and raised here, has retained strong links with New Zealand. However, he is perceived for the most part as an 'international' star. Holly Hunter and Harvey Keitel, ever present in the multiplexes, need no further explanation. It seemed that Anna Paquin and a handful of 'unnamed Maori' were our only indigenous products.

The Piano has been of obvious interest to feminism, both within New Zealand and 'internationally'. The critical focus on gender and feminism has been heightened by Jane Campion's role as an auteur, a lone female permitted to join the ranks of a male pantheon – and Pakeha women were undoubtedly proud of the achievements of one of their kind. Moreover, Ada McGrath presumably was a representation of our foremothers, and in this we felt we had a stake.

Much of the overseas debate has been published, appropriately enough, in *Screen*. The articles tend to be derived from, yet challenge, Laura Mulvey's seminal article from 1975. The positions expressed largely support the film as a feminist text, interpreting Ada's role in the film, her ability to 'gaze', her choice of costume, man and life, as a sign of female subjectivity.⁵ Indeed, to have a foundation myth 'narrated' by a silent woman rebuts the very basis of the frontier or Western genre. The 'man alone' and 'larrakin' stereotypes that have dominated New Zealand film history have been predicated on the absence or marginalization of Pakeha women, and have contributed to our myths of a national identity. Ada McGrath offered a striking contrast; not only is she the central character of *The Piano*, it is her desire that determines the twists of the plot.

Implicit in the *Screen* debate is the 'other side' – the doubts felt and expressed by some. The film's use of a traditional narrative structure and its realist aesthetics, its depictions of coerced sex and its emphasis on heterosexual romance and a happy ending, have led some to be dubious about its feminist content. Moreover, for all her subjectivity, Ada remains an object of desire, her beauty a 'cultured' one with apparent class appeal. Her stark elegance, coiled hair and, above all, her connection to culture, mark her as distinct from both the Maori women and from the 'lower-class' women that surround her. They offer a crude naturalized sexuality while hers is typically romantic, sublimated in her piano playing, smouldering, enigmatic. She promises much, gives little away. It seems possible to argue then that *The Piano* relies on a reproduction of women's role and image as the source of desire, even as it supposedly places Ada as the desiring subject.

If Pakeha women lined up on both sides of the 'feminist' debate about Ada, her lover Baines had, for some of us, a particular resonance. With his *moko*, his hybrid clothing, and his supposedly easy and practical physicality, he is familiar to us all as a precursor of the Kiwi male. He may appear the transgressor in *The Piano*, literally marked out against the repressed and anxious 'British' masculinity of

5 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 6–18. Also, see 'The Piano debates', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 257–87.

6 Jock Phillips, 'The pioneer man – from experience to legend', in *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male, a History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1996).

7 Ibid., p. 5.

8 Linda Dyson, 'The return of the repressed? Whiteness, femininity, and colonialism in *The Piano*', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 267–76.

Stewart, but it is precisely this difference that defines him as a New Zealander, a rugged practical bloke, distinct from the wimpish 'Brits'.

New Zealand historian Jock Phillips⁶ in his study of the image of the Pakeha male, examines how colonial New Zealand was marketed as a country where 'men could be men again'. The decline of productive work and the rise of clerical and shop employment for men in Victorian Britain had engendered deep anxiety about sex roles. Emigration to New Zealand provided a chance to face life in the raw. 'It is the strong and the bold who go forth to subdue the wilderness and conquer new lands', said an advertising brochure of the 1840s.⁷ Well and good, but the masculine competition, mateship and isolation that framed the male colonial experience produced also a contempt for, and violence against, women, a tradition of boozing, crude language and deep homophobia. The Kiwi bloke in his contemporary guise continues to dominate the construction of New Zealand masculinity, and despite the gains made by feminism, the negative behaviours associated with blokedom continue. The statistics on drinking, deaths on the road, violence against women and suicide rates make depressing reading.

Baines, however, offers the New Zealand audience, particularly the Pakeha female spectator, a hybrid character. He retains an earthiness, an ease with his body, the Maori and his environment, yet combines these qualities with an emotional sensitivity, a kind of monosyllabic ability to communicate. This hybridization, built on what would be seen as contradictory characteristics, becomes encoded as deeply attractive to New Zealand women – a bloke equipped with communicative skills and sensitivity that in theory undermines and feminizes the very masculinity that structures him.

Linda Dyson in her contribution to the debate on *The Piano* similarly interprets Baines as the prototypical Kiwi male.⁸ The developing sexual relationship between Ada and Baines, Dyson argues, enacts a fantasy of colonial reconciliation, permitting the two to shift from being British migrants to becoming proper New Zealanders. At the end of the film, when Ada surfaces after jumping overboard with her piano, it remains a symbol of British bourgeois culture, at the bottom of the ocean. Having appropriated sufficient 'Maori-ness' to ensure his difference, Baines can then be nicely domesticated in the New Zealand suburbs.

As Dyson argues, however, this shift from migrant to settler is at the cost of Maori. Crucially, within the film's scenario, it is the native people who provide the backdrop for the emotional drama of the principal white characters. The general passivity of the Maori in the film lends them a timeless essence; suspended outside history, they play nature to the white characters' culture. This, Dyson points out, is an old tactic, an opposition that draws on discourses of primitivism which have historically constructed the colonial Other as 'noble savage'.

9 L. Pihama, 'Are films dangerous? A Maori woman's perspective on *The Piano*', *Hecate: Special Aotearoa/New Zealand Issue*, vol. XX, no. 2 (1995), pp. 239–42. Pihama agrees with Dyson, arguing that the images of Maori in *The Piano* perpetuate colonial misrepresentations. Some Maori, however, expressed pleasure at seeing their people represented – and certainly the issue of land ownership raised – in such a prominent film.

It is, in fact, the representation of Maori in *The Piano* that caused the most discussion amongst Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand. Overseas, it was the film's troubling feminism that dominated the debate, the representation of Maori was mentioned only fleetingly. Linda Dyson alone gave a fully theorized account of how the placement of Maori in the film functioned within the narrative. She expressed what many New Zealanders, Maori and Pakeha, were feeling – that the Maori were reproduced as simple natives.⁹

Dyson points out that this 'historical' articulation of sexuality and colonialism reverberates with contemporary questions of identity. She suggests that Pakeha, in recent times, have been undergoing a 'crisis' of national identity. Britain's continuing shift of focus away from the former loyalties of Empire, coupled with the Maori demands for justice, have forced Pakeha to reassess their colonial history. An already precarious sense of belonging feels further undone and, as a palliative, Pakeha are increasingly laying claim to a white ethnicity, a kind of new indigeneity. Neither part of Empire nor truly indigenous, Pakeha borrow Maori-ness to articulate their specificity and their difference. *The Piano*, Dyson argues, in restaging the colonial encounter, addresses the postcolonial anxieties of white New Zealand, the reworking of the nature/culture trope providing the means to represent and affirm a newly indigenized national identity.

However, what Dyson's argument fails to consider is the reception of the film in this country. Without essentializing nationalism or sounding overly optimistic, there has been a shift in perception and attitude in New Zealand towards 'biculturalism' and this, I would argue, shaped the response of the country to *The Piano*. Biculturalism, an official policy since the mid 1980s, is predicated on forging a 'special relationship' between Maori and Pakeha. Based on a revitalization of the Treaty of Waitangi, which has the status of a constitutional document, the bicultural position suggests that New Zealand will never advance until it acknowledges this founding relationship. Biculturalism is not merely decorative but has been, and is being, enacted in the redistribution of land and resources wrongfully confiscated during 150 years of colonization. For example, the Sealord Deal has allocated Maori a proportion of the country's valuable commercial fishing industry. The Tainui and Nga Tahu *iwi* (tribal) settlements have involved the return of land and the award of a significant financial package as restitution for land stolen. Many more settlements are currently before the Waitangi Tribunal, a body that was established to make recommendations on the Maori and *iwi* claims.

Thus I feel that the uneasiness experienced by the majority of the New Zealand audiences towards *The Piano* indicates that New Zealanders refuse to be 'conciliated' by the film in the way that Dyson suggests. To be sure, the shift towards biculturalism has been forced upon Pakeha by Maori efforts to preserve their culture and their

heritage. However, despite some grumbling, there has obviously been sufficient political will on the part of the majority of Pakeha to accept the Waitangi Tribunal's decisions. And it is precisely this political will – the recognition of this 'special relationship' – that made most of us uncomfortable with the film. It is not that Dyson was wrong; *The Piano* may well have been attempting to resolve and reestablish Pakeha identity as she argues. However, Pakeha were for the most part unwilling to be positioned in such a way by the film. The marginalization of Maori does not reflect a climate that has made a revisiting of the Treaty of Waitangi possible. Whereas the credit for this must lie with Maori persistence and strength, the fact it has happened at all indicates that the majority of Pakeha have the willingness to at least consider sharing power.

debate:

Rhetorical powerplay: a note on Ien Ang's review of *The Dynasty Years*

JOSTEIN GRIPSRUD

1 Ien Ang, *Screen*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1996), pp. 317–22.

Screen has chosen to reprint Ien Ang's review¹ of my book *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies*, after it was first published in the *Norwegian Journal of Media Studies*. I have therefore had an extra occasion to read it and think about it. I am aware that it is not quite *comme il faut* to respond to reviews of one's own work. And Ang does in fact recommend the book as 'a solid, sensible and intelligent piece of work which should be read by anyone interested in the development of "critical media studies" in the past fifteen years or so' (p. 317). So why complain? The reason is that I find a particular rhetorical strategy operating in her review very problematic. This strategy not only leads to a quite distorted presentation of my book, but ultimately it concerns the very basis for international scholarly discussions. I therefore find it more important now to comment on the rhetorical construction of her review than to respond to, for instance, the questions raised about the role of intellectuals. That I will return to on another occasion – it is, in fact, part of a project I am presently working on.

After briefly mentioning a few of the central points and positions in *The Dynasty Years*, which are summarized in the book's Introduction,

Ang says it is 'a very *European* book':

'The kinds of critical positions Gripsrud puts forward (anti-relativism, anti-populism but also anti-elitism, in favour of explicating criteria for textual 'quality', in short against rampant postmodernization) only make full sense, I would argue, precisely in the specific transitional European time-space in which he aims to intervene.' (p. 319)

She then moves on to say that 'Scandinavia has been the most "pure" site for these transitions', and starts a description of Nordic work on media reception, bundling together quite different forms of research and researchers, and makes me a representative of this constructed research formation. Finally, she can conclude that 'the thrust of Gripsrud's work makes most sense if read against the background of its Norwegian context' (p. 321). In other words, the positions sketched in Ang's parenthesis above are supposedly not only 'very European' – they do not only make less sense outside a 'specific European time-space' – they are also tied to specific Nordic conditions, and 'the thrust' of my work actually makes less sense outside of a specifically Norwegian context.

In this way, the review has the book geographically cornered: *The Dynasty Years* must be read not as an intervention in central international debates but as a report from a remote north-western corner of Europe; its critical positions and arguments are fundamentally tied to the very specific 'time-space' *from where the author is speaking*. When Ang then goes on to blame me for not having appropriately reflected on the fact that I am *male*, this works as a further reason for not having to deal with, for instance, my critiques of a number of fashionable positions in recent media and cultural studies and dominant positions in soap opera criticism over the last fifteen years. Readers of Ang's review are not really informed what the book's positions and arguments on such issues are, since the focus of the review is mainly on the author's geographical background, and, ultimately, gender.

In rhetorical terms, this seems to me a version of *ad hominem* argumentation; in soccer terms, it is going for the player, not the ball. Ethically and politically, this is a highly dubious rhetorical weapon. Within certain academic fields it has nevertheless gained a kind of respectability dressed up as a theory of 'speaking positions'. This theory has developed from a matter of hermeneutic reflexivity, scholarly precaution and modesty to a matter of the right to speak. Certain circles try to impose strict limitations on what scholars can legitimately speak of on the basis of, for instance, their gender, race, nationality or sexual orientation. The thrust of Ang's review demonstrates a milder version of this practice: this guy's arguments do not really make sense outside of his geographically determined and gendered context. Ang's review emphasizes so much that *the whole*

book is firmly tied to the context of a particular geographical and cultural periphery that it is in effect – whether intended or not – undercutting my participation, and, in consequence, that of others living in non-English-speaking countries, on equal terms in international scholarly dialogue.

The view that my theoretical positions, reasoning and suggestions for media-political practice are specifically Norwegian or Nordic is simply not sustainable. Is ‘anti-relativism, anti-populism but also anti-elitism, in favour of explicating criteria for textual “quality”, in short against rampant postmodernization’ really something specifically Nordic? To my knowledge, and I have a pretty wide net of international contacts, these positions and the issues they refer to are very widespread. In the area of broadcast television, Ang claims that the ‘concern with “quality” with the aim of influencing institutional reform’ is ‘distinctive of the Nordic work’ (p. 320). But such a concern, ultimately geared towards (or dreaming of) practical consequences, can be found in a variety of forms in a large number of countries, all over the world – Australia, Ang’s present habitat, among them. The Japanese NHK’s Broadcasting Culture Research Institute published four books with international contributions 1991–4 about ‘quality assessment of broadcast programming’. The concern with quality is furthermore represented in the recently published report from UNESCO’s commission on culture and development. My own views of the question of ‘quality’ and how to regulate media will probably be different from those of many others. But they are definitely *not* particularly Norwegian or Nordic.

As already mentioned, according to the review it is not only speaking from Norway which limits the ‘sense’ of my work. It is also that I define myself ‘purely and simply – and unproblematically – as “intellectual”, as if this can be an encompassing identity not intersected by “embodied” subject positions related to, for example, gender and ethnicity’ (p. 321). Ang goes on to ask:

Is Gripsrud not also a man and does this not affect his subjectivity as well, making him share things with other, not necessarily intellectual, men, and separating him, in important respects, from women, both intellectual and non-intellectual? I do not want to be socially determinist here, but I do want to point to the need to be more self-reflexive about the situatedness of our intellectual speaking positions.

My primary answer to this is that it is only the validity of arguments and analysis which legitimately matters in both scholarly and other public debates. If I argued that soap opera is an idiotic genre (which I do not), my masculinity might help explain *why* I held such a view and tried to construct an argument in support of it. The view itself could in my opinion only be legitimately refuted by judging the arguments put forward; pointing at my sex or gender is an ethically illegitimate tactic to avoid confronting the arguments. If a female

scholar argued the same, (that soap opera is stupid – someone might), it seems obvious to me that a questioning of her personal gender identity is an unjust response. My sex, gender, race and ethnicity is immaterial to the evaluation of my argument.

My second answer is that attempts at hermeneutic self-reflection are often a sensible element of work in the humanities and social sciences. It may be offered in order to facilitate the understanding of the text, and to indicate an awareness of 'the situatedness of our intellectual speaking positions': that is, to acknowledge the inescapable partiality of one's comprehension. It is in rhetorical terms a topos of modesty. In scholarly work, this is part of the generally required explication of the (pre)conditions of the study presented. It is a question of stating one's theoretical, and possibly political and personal, background, to the degree that this helps explain, not legitimate, methodological choices and interpretive procedures and strategies. Such self-reflection is very much included in my book. It is included in the Introduction in remarks about my geographical, theoretical and political background, whole sections are devoted to it in chapters two and three, and I do, for instance, specifically comment that my being male would be a serious limitation if I were to conduct interviews with female members of the *Dynasty* audience (p. 158). In general, my preferred style of writing is also a direct and quite personal one, so that no one reading what I have written should be in doubt that there is a live human being behind the words, not some totally objective oracle.

The consequence of my views here is, for instance, that I take Ien Ang seriously as a fellow scholar when reading her book *Watching Dallas*: I concentrate on her analysis, arguments, theorizing, methodology, logic. I do not think it is relevant that she is a woman and I am a man if I, for example, find her much-referred-to concept 'tragic structure of feeling' quite empty. It is similarly not relevant to the fact that, on the other hand, I find her term 'emotional realism' useful.

Ang's use of my geographical background and gender in her review becomes particularly problematic since a) it is a matter of academic sociology that she speaks from a high position, a position of prominence and authority, in international cultural studies, and b) that she does not herself live up to her seemingly universal demand for making explicit a 'heightened critical self-reflection on the inescapable "personal" politics of the intellectual', related to gender and ethnicity, either in her review or in her books *Watching Dallas* and *Desperately Seeking the Audience*.

In the latter, she defines the 'we' frequently used in her writings thus: 'the rather loose community of scholars, critics and other intellectuals, whose general task in a free and democratic society it is to interpret and comment upon important developments and events that affect our common conditions of existence'.² I would like to think that we are both members of this community (along with any reader

2 Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 153.

of *Screen*), and that this should make us particularly aware of the necessity to maintain elementary principles for rational and fair public discussion. The currently fashionable use of the theory of 'speaking positions' can, as demonstrated in Ang's review of *The Dynasty Years*, only lead to a distortion of the basis for our activities as interpreters and commentators.

P.S.

Interestingly, the only omission made in *Screen*'s version of the review, compared to the original version in the Norwegian journal, is the following:

With so much on these dense, 300 plus pages, it was impossible for this reviewer to read all of them with sustained interest and attention. In that sense, I am definitely not a 'comprehensive reader', much like most TV viewers, who, I would think, are increasingly compelled to watch TV texts in fragments rather than in wholes, due to abundance of provision and other, related forms of 'postmodernization' of television, culture and everyday life.³

3 Ien Ang, *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, no. 2 (1995), p. 179.

reviews

review:

Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, 456pp.

Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 347pp.

JULIAN PETLEY

In 1994 I was asked to contribute a chapter on images of the British in Third Reich cinema to a book about Anglo-German relations during the present century.¹ Researching the subject I was immensely struck by how little the accepted wisdom on Third Reich cinema had changed since I wrote *Capital and Culture* in 1979.² Though not without problems of its own, that book was at least an attempt to sketch out (and no more than that) an approach to Third Reich cinema which took on board recent thinking about the relationship between film and ideology, and also tried to explore certain lesser-known aspects of National Socialism via an economic, political and ideological analysis of Third Reich cinema. In particular it strove to avoid the twin pitfalls of regarding the cinema of the Third Reich and the films which that cinema produced as either mere puppets of Goebbels's admittedly formidable propaganda apparatus or, conversely, as sites of aesthetic subversion and covert political resistance.

Whilst there have since been a number of significant studies of individual aspects of Third Reich cinema which have been informed

1 Julian Petley, 'Perfidious Albion: the depiction of Great Britain in films of the Third Reich', in Cedric Cullingford and Harald Husemann (eds), *Anglo-German Attitudes* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), pp. 181–93.

2 Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema 1933–45* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

- 3 See, in particular, the entries for Karsten Witte in the bibliography of Rentschler.
- 4 Stephen Lowry, *Pathos and Politik: Ideologie in Spielfilmen des Nationalsozialismus* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991).

by contemporary theories of cinema and ideology,³ it was not until 1991 that a theoretically sophisticated overview of the subject appeared,⁴ and this has yet to be translated into English. It was thus somewhat paradoxical (though, of course, no less welcome) that 1996 should have seen the publication of *two* absolutely first-rate books on the cinema of the Reich. Neither pretends to be a comprehensive critical overview, since each deals with only a small number of the 1,094 features made during this period. Furthermore, both stick pretty closely to the established canon of Third Reich classics, although Eric Rentschler is adventurous with his choice of *Der verlorene Sohn/The Prodigal Son* (1934), *Glückskinder/Lucky Kids* (1936) and *Paracelsus* (1943), whilst Linda Schulte-Sasse also analyses lesser-known works such as *Komödianten* (1941), *Friedemann Bach* (1941) and *Diesel* (1942). However, both skilfully use the particular to illustrate the general, and Rentschler's book contains a quite staggering range of references: in Chomsky style, 219 of the book's 456 pages are taken up with appendices, notes and bibliography.

Fortunately, both books are complementary, each adopting a rather different (but by no means opposed or irreconcilable) approach. Both, however, are agreed on the crucial point, namely that the cinema of the Third Reich cannot be defined as quintessentially Other. Thus, for example, Rentschler argues that 'in its cynical belief that it offered people what they wanted, Nazi mass culture emulated and replicated American patterns of recognition' (p. 22), quotes Thomas Elsaesser to the effect that Third Reich films 'appear readable in terms of classical narrative in much the same way as do Hollywood films of the 1930's' (p. 23), and concludes that:

From its quality features to its run-of-the-mill products, Nazi film reflected the workings of the classical cinema with its deference to character motivation, the codes of realism, the strictures of dramatic development and closure. It was a cinema dedicated to illusionism. 'The task that I have posed for myself as a director', claimed Veit Harlan, 'consists to a great part in making spectators forget that they are sitting in cinemas.' Goebbels saw himself as a German David O. Selznick and sought to create a film world every bit as alluring as Hollywood. Nazi films to a great degree seemed unexceptional and resembled Anglo-European features of the era. (p. 217).

Similarly Schulte-Sasse claims that Third Reich films are no more of an anomaly than National Socialism is an historical aberration, and points out that 'a specific setting or historical configuration is irrelevant to the fundamental textual operations at work in Nazi cinema' (p. 232). Drawing on her thesis that National Socialism appropriated for its own ends a good deal of the bourgeois culture that emerged in Germany in the eighteenth century, and not least the family-based narratives, the binary value system and the timeless,

universal notion of virtue of the 'bourgeois tragedies' of Lessing and Schiller, she argues that,

Eighteenth-century literature erected a narrative, ideological, social-psychological apparatus that remains in place today in modern narratives, and that seems especially 'transparent' in popular narratives (although their simple-mindedness may be somewhat deceptive once we look for internal ruptures). If nothing else, the fact that the first five minutes of any Nazi feature film generally tells us where our emotional alignment belongs (even if today, with our twenty-twenty hindsight, we may refuse to cooperate) should tell us we're in familiar territory. (p. 232)

Now, although this has the distinct advantage of rescuing Third Reich cinema from those who would regard it as irredeemably Other, of opening up all of it (and not simply those films conventionally and conveniently thought of as 'propaganda') to ideological investigation, and of allowing for the possibility of revealing (and distinctly uncomfortable) cross-cultural comparisons, there is, of course, a crucial proviso to be entered here. That is, an awareness of what makes Third Reich films so similar in so many ways to 'classical', Hollywood narrative movies must be complemented by an equally acute awareness of what makes them different and specific. Otherwise the door is left wide open to the ever-growing army of revisionists, apologists and cinematic de-Nazifiers so ably (and worryingly) documented by the indefatigable Rentschler in the sections of his book devoted to the 'afterlife' of Nazi cinema.

There are at least two ways of doing this. The first is to argue that, in the particular context of the Third Reich, the mechanisms of classical narrative cinema take on an especially acute ideological significance. As Rentschler puts it:

film theorists have often speculated about the ideological effects of the 'dominant cinema', proposing that classical narratives seek to mesmerize and mystify viewers by means of imaginary seductions. Film production in the Third Reich offers a strikingly concrete example of such a theoretical construct put into practice. (p. 16)

Schulte-Sasse takes this idea further, arguing that the subject effect of classical cinema (illusory wholeness, compensatory satisfactions and so on) is 'wholly consistent with the subject effect to which Nazism aspired' (p. 33). As she explains, with particular reference to Benjamin on 'aestheticized politics' and Kracauer on the 'mass ornament', the operations of cinematic texts within the Reich have to be seen as part and parcel of the operation of Nazi spectacle as a whole, whose function was one of 'incessantly reinforcing an imaginary collective identity via rituals sustaining the illusion of social harmony. Whatever form it takes, spectacle becomes more an end in itself than a means to an end' (p. 28), negating all forms of social

5 David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

6 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

negativity and offering a reconciliation of antagonisms possible only in the imaginary.

The other way in which to ensure that a proper awareness of the specifically cinematic qualities of Third Reich films does not fall prey to a purely aesthetic recuperation (which of course has political consequences) is to ensure that any such analysis is firmly placed within a broader political, economic and ideological analysis of not simply the Third Reich but Germany as a whole. This is obviously a tall order for film theorists, but it is absolutely crucial if Third Reich films are not to be subjected to ludicrously ill-informed and misleading readings by the likes of David Stewart Hull.⁵

Fortunately both Rentschler and Schulte-Sasse, in their different ways, pass this test with flying colours, though we still await the book which looks at Nazi cinema *as a whole* in the light of a really thoroughgoing and detailed analysis of National Socialist ideology *as a whole*. Of the two books, Schulte-Sasse is the more textually inclined, whilst Rentschler combines textual with more conjunctural and contextual analysis. As Schulte-Sasse puts it:

rather than taking ideology as a starting point and looking at how movies show ideology, we can perhaps take movies as a starting point and examine how they harbor, transform, exceed, and undermine political ideology. If we start this way, we may see contradictions where we would most expect ideological homogeneity, and need not be vexed by movies that don't seem to 'fit'. (p. xiii)

She also adds, however, that:

Nazi movies, regardless of genre, need to be studied in themselves *and* anchored in the context of their culture's moral and aesthetic values. To begin understanding these we have to consider the anxieties and fantasies that find their way into aesthetic products like movies. Such fantasies and anxieties are, of course, informed by social, political, and personal realities, and at the same time are reinforced when they are recycled in movies and other cultural texts. We have to ask where the stories in which these fantasies are couched come from and to consider how a specific aesthetic medium, in this case film, forms or transforms the ideas, values, and narrative forms underlying it. (p. 5)

Schulte-Sasse's conception of ideology draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis via Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.⁶ Arguing that 'what is going on in Nazi cinema is to be found not only in its ideological patterns but in a broader social-psychological function that encompasses and transcends ideology' (p. 6), she turns to the 'social fantasies' by which societies mask the impossibility of the ideals by which they define themselves. Thus, for example, the fantasy of the 'Jew' (as opposed to the flesh and blood Jew) masks the

impossibility of the corporatist ideal of the organic, racially 'pure' society, and, through a process of displacement and condensation, becomes a projection of complete social negativity. This is then counterpointed by the positive fantasy of the 'Leader', such as Frederick the Great, and both fantasies are seen as responses to a modernity which is perceived by National Socialism as hostile. As Schulte-Sasse notes, what distinguishes this kind of approach from traditional ideology critique is that it does not content itself with laying bare the discursive features of an ideology but aims, rather, in Zizek's words, at 'extracting the kernel of enjoyment, at articulating the way in which – beyond the field of meaning but at the same time internal to it – an ideology implies, manipulates, produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy'.⁷

National Socialism's body politic is hardly accounted for by these two fantasies, however, which need to be complemented by and anchored in two further imaginary constructions: 'Germany' and 'German history':

Nazism's fantasies 'take shape' simultaneously in more abstract terms, through an imaginary social body, a construction called 'Germany' that is vaguely defined (or, more accurately, presumed) in the spatial and temporal terms of narrative. National Socialism conceives 'Germany' as a geographic space that needs to be molded as one, maintained as one, or retrieved as one, depending on the historical juncture. Inseparable from this geographic wholeness is a temporal dimension writing 'German history' as a familiar narrative of struggle whose pain is overdetermined by an ultimate telos, or imaginary presence, of harmony. In other words, the painful history Nazism dredges up can be enjoyed because it is organized in the form of stories guaranteeing harmonious closure; the greater the pain, the greater the pleasure. (p. 18)

Those unfamiliar with the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis should not be put off; Schulte-Sasse's more abstract passages soon give way to lucid applications of the theory to individual texts, and these are most illuminating. Furthermore, anyone familiar with Benedict Anderson's work on imagined communities⁸ should have no difficulty with the idea of Germany as an 'imaginary social body', whilst a psychoanalytic approach to National Socialism, albeit an approach different to Lacan's, has already been essayed (admittedly with mixed results) by Wilhelm Reich.⁹ Schulte-Sasse's attention to textual details is complemented by a thorough knowledge of the eighteenth-century German culture in which she grounds her analysis, and her acute readings of individual films clearly demonstrate that there is no necessary incompatibility between psychoanalytic and ideological approaches to the cinema.

On the debit side, it could be argued, firstly, that Schulte-Sasse's reliance on textual analysis in places leads to an unnecessary and

⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁹ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

10 Steve Neale, 'Propaganda', in *Screen*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1977), p. 39.

unproductive muddle over the hoary old question of the difference between, on the one hand, the 'political' and 'propaganda' and, on the other, 'entertainment' (pp. 2–4). As Steve Neale has pointed out, in an article cited by the author in a different context, one needs to step outside the text to avoid this false dichotomy:

identification of any one text as propaganda can never simply be a matter of the reading off of a set of textual characteristics. What has to be identified is the *use* to which a particular text is put, to its function within a particular situation, to its place within cinema conceived as a social practice.¹⁰

Thus films which had non-propagandist, 'classical' textual properties nonetheless functioned as propaganda within the particular social conjuncture of the Third Reich because of the way in which they were placed within the apparatuses involved in their consumption.

Secondly, Schulte-Sasse does have a tendency to set up what she calls 'ideology critique' as something of a straw man which is then all too easily demolished. Thus, whilst it is all too true that many contemporary cultural representations of the Third Reich, such as Hollywood movies, 'do more than deprive the era of its contradictions and heterogeneity; they rob it of the one thing even the most murderous state cannot live without: its normalcy' (p. 2), that we 'have to be willing to modify the image we have of Nazi culture, to let its internal contradictions as well as its continuities to earlier and later cultures speak' (p. 5), and that we have to avoid a narrativized, homogenized, flattened-out image of Nazism becoming 'another kind of social fantasy, a convenient Other against which we can find our own, untroubled identity' (p. 11), there is, nevertheless, nothing in 'ideology critique' which *necessarily* leads to these undesirable ends. Indeed, quite the opposite. Nor is it the case that 'every critique of ideological configurations in a given narrative, through its very methodology, is forced to act as if meaning is fixed once and for all within a given text'; nor that 'Ideology critique is thus propelled by a desire to erase contradictions within a text and between text and reader' (pp. 5–6). It may be that this is all too often the way in which actual 'ideology critiques' proceed in the case of analyses of Third Reich films, but I would argue that this is because nothing like enough work has been done on National Socialist ideology itself – most certainly including its contradictions, which are contained in its very appellation.

Thirdly, there are moments when Schulte-Sasse seems, to this reader at least, to come dangerously close to veering from a perfectly proper analysis of the ideological contradictions within National Socialism and the films produced by its film industry towards the much more dubious terrain of 'semiotic democracy'. For example:

If one dispenses with preconceived ideas and *looks* at these films, one finds that not only are they riddled with the same ruptures and

internal subversions that beleaguer virtually all narrative texts, but that the popular success many enjoyed may be tied precisely to these ruptures, which compromise – if not necessarily contradict – their ‘Nazi message’. The struggle to make the ‘Jew’ Other ends up making him ambivalent if not appealing; films about Genius/Leader figures may overshoot the mark, rendering their hero so insufferably perfect as to make his adversary more sympathetic; many films thrive on a melodrama not necessarily accommodated to Nazi totalitarianism, which, as we will see, involves an exorcism of the private sphere. In other words, it could be that what works as film competes with the working of indoctrination – even if all films have ideology as their by-product. (p. 4)

Following this line of thought Schulte-Sasse argues of *Jud Süß/Jew Süß* (1940):

the film ‘wants’ to make him irreducibly Other, but in trying to do so must draw on its own literary and film culture, thereby implicitly revealing its projections to be just that. It ends up, furthermore, making him curiously admirable by ascribing to him immeasurable sexual, political, and economic power. (p. 14)

In the same vein, Schulte-Sasse wonders what factors in *Friedrich Schiller* (1940) make it possible for it to be read as both a pro- and anti-Nazi film, and ‘what narrative or cinematic configurations create ruptures in both readings’ (p. 152). But surely the question here is: readings by whom? By a reader in the Third Reich? By a film theorist in 1997? Or by critics such as Hull or Rudolf Oertel, whose complete ignorance of National Socialist ideology, and especially of its crucial ‘radical’ aspect, leads them into ludicrous misreadings of a quite unsustainable kind?

This, I think, leads us on to the most important question of all, and that is: why study Third Reich cinema at all today? Because we are running out of virgin texts about which to write books and articles? To see if the ‘active audience’ existed in the most thoroughly ‘coordinated’ society imaginable? I think not, and I do not for one moment believe that Schulte-Sasse thinks so either, though it would be ironic indeed if her excellent book led lesser scholars down another byway off the revisionist path.

Rentschler’s book provides the answer, or at least most of it. And it is this: in a society in which highly mystified representations of the Third Reich abound, be they popular fictions set in a largely mythological Nazi Germany, or revisionist accounts of Third Reich cinema itself, we need to understand the Third Reich through its own movies, and vice versa. This way we get to know the Reich from within, as it were, and to access its own self-image. The real strength of his book is that he combines sophisticated formal analyses of the films themselves with a formidable knowledge of the whole situation

11 Erwin Leiser, *Nazi Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), pp. 16–7.

12 Ibid., p. 12.

13 Louis Marcorelles, 'The Nazi cinema (1933–1945)', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1955), p. 67.

in which they were both produced and consumed. What emerges is a highly nuanced series of readings which is well aware of the contradictions both within the films themselves and within National Socialist ideology as a whole, but which never loses sight of the fact that the Third Reich was a fully coordinated society which, in the final analysis, offered little real freedom to either the producers or consumers of cultural products. It would be difficult to take issue with the subtlety and complexity of Rentschler's analyses of his individual films, but if one has a criticism it is that these do not always sit very comfortably with his more general passages, and in particular with the perorations with which he tends to end his chapters. Here he often seems to come perilously close to the language of what he calls the 'Teutonic Horror Picture Show' approach, of which he is rightly so critical. As an example of this approach he cites Erwin Leiser's remark that in the Third Reich entertainment films functioned 'to distract the audience from reality and lull them to sleep, generally by means of the battery of clichés manufactured in the arsenal of Nazi propaganda',¹¹ and his contention that viewers 'were to be manipulated without being shown the direction in which they were being led'.¹² He also criticizes Louis Marcorelles for arguing that the only National Socialist line in 'escapist' Third Reich films 'seemed to exist solely in providing the best kind of recreation for a populace long deprived of so many of the charms of life, and drawn more and more inexorably towards total war'.¹³ But then compare these statements with those of Rentschler himself: 'Goebbels sought to transform the film apparatus into a tool of the state, a medium of myth, legend, and fantasy which would relieve reality of its dialectical complexity' (pp. 67–8). Or again:

as the Nazi government made its first moves toward implementing Hitler's expansionist designs, Goebbels endeavoured to maximize film's seductive potential, to cloak party priorities in alluring shapes, to aestheticize politics in order to anesthetize the populace . . . German studios created realms of illusion which, on the surface, reflected little of everyday realities. (p. 122)

And finally:

standardized mass culture, Goebbels realized, was the secret formula for successful mass manipulation. Mass culture also became a crucial precondition for mass murder. The media enabled Germans to withstand awful truths and ignore hideous presentiments, serving as a shield and a blindfold, audiovisual instruments that ensured uplifting fictions no matter how bitter the realities. (p. 222)

Such passages do seem a curious lapse into instrumentalism and conspiracy theory following textual analyses which so convincingly suggest that the ideological wellsprings of these movies lie deep within German culture, as well as more specifically within that

14 Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little, Brown, 1996).

particular manifestation of it known as National Socialism. After all, as Kracauer, Elsaesser and others have shown, there is much that is reactionary and fascistic in Weimar cinema, but there was no Propaganda Ministry then, no Goebbels. Furthermore, recent revelations about the genocide committed by the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front, not to mention Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*,¹⁴ forcibly suggest that the residents of the Reich were in no need of blindfolds, shields, fictions, anaesthetics or anything similar as they set about 'cleansing' the Reich of its 'undesirable' elements, and moving into the spaces to the East emptied by genocide on a quite unimaginable scale. What we need to explain this is an analysis of fascism's *popular* appeal, its sedimentation in 'common sense' or, in other words, an exploration of 'everyday fascism'. This could not be more urgent than at the present time, with Europe experiencing a resurgence of extreme right-wing ideologies of one kind or another – from fascism proper through nationalisms of the most xenophobic kind to the 'radical' authoritarian populism represented by the Europhobic wing of the current Tory party and large sections of the British press. Rentschler wonders how Third Reich films 'now resonate in a climate of violence towards foreigners, in a nation casting about for a new collective self-understanding' (p. 221), and of course he is right to do so; but looking at some of the cultural products of our own society – and especially our bigoted, paranoid, racist, intolerant, populist newspapers – I have to say it is not revivals of Third Reich movies which cause me most worry.

review:

Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 219pp.

Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age*. London: Athlone Press, 1996, 182pp.

J. P. Telotte, *Replications: a Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 222pp.

SEAN CUBITT

The Borg queen, in whose feminized artificial body is concentrated the hive mind of her cyborg species, has grafted human skin onto the male android Data. She commences her seduction by blowing gently on the graft. Data is ecstatic, and we believe that he has been lured by the promise of a hitherto unknown carnal bliss. A beautifully executed composite of computer graphic and closeup gives us the intimate vision of the hairs raising on his arm under the Borg queen's sensual puff. Data's greatest longing has been to become human: here, he attains one element of that humanity, but only via the execution of digital programming at Industrial Light and Magic, George Lucas's special-effects house responsible for the digital elements of *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). The critic is tempted to allegorical interpretation: the Borg queen is the old cinema, half flesh, half machine, utterly opposed to the values of the human, dedicated to their assimilation; Data represents the new cinema of total artifice, whose loyalty to the human is guaranteed by his yearning to join humanity on humanity's terms, viruality yearning for reality. Despite their apparent similarities, the cinema of effects and the cinema of identification are at war for the soul of the human. But this story can only be told in the

hybrid form of a cinema composited of photographic and digital media, where the artifice is the spectacle, and even the intimacy of arousal, like Data's 'emotion chip', must be generated mechanically.

Throughout its thirty-year history, *Star Trek* has played on the Cartesian identification of the human and the rational, with the Vulcan Spock and the android Data providing a comic foil to the emotionally rounded human and quasi-human members of the crew. That reason, in the service of the Good represented by the Federation, has always been male. The Borg seduction, however, introduces the figure of the female cyborg; not, of course, as Donna Haraway's ironic metaphor of hybrid and constructed identities,¹ but as ominous Bad Mother, a retake on the armoured biology of the mother in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986). The figures of the robot, the android and the cyborg have become central thematics of cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, as they have of contemporary popular culture. The increasing contiguity of people and their devices in the industrialized world parallels the history of cinema: it is unsurprising that film has devoted so much of its time and artistry to evoking the pleasures and anxieties marked in an increasingly ambiguous borderline between the two, and that it has done so repeatedly in terms of its other great obsession, the fluctuating boundary between male and female.

J.P. Telotte's 'robotic history' traces the movement of cinematic artifice through close readings of exemplary films (*Metropolis* [Fritz Lang, 1926], *Forbidden Planet* [Fred McLeod Wilcox, 1956], *Westworld* [Michael Crichton, 1973] and *Futureworld* [Richard T. Heffron, 1976], and the *Terminator* films [James Cameron, 1984, 1991]) with reference to many more, notably in a fascinating chapter on the serials (though curiously bereft of reference to Lacassin's seminal work on the subject).² At the book's heart is a response to Baudrillard's conception of the simulacral as telos of a technologizing history in which the pure fact of human existence is no longer self-sufficient. In *Forbidden Planet*, for example, the 'explicit subtexts about the media . . . suggest a level on which film and audience together might be seen as technological creations, all part of a culture of simulacra' (p. 118), earlier citing Garrett Stewart's essay on the SF iconography of screens, holograms and viewing devices,³ in which cinema becomes a kind of 'synecdoche for the entire technics of an imagined society', a society which, moreover, owes its interest to the ways in which it doubles the historical one. So Telotte can posit the science-fiction cinema, specifically the figure of the robot, as a metacritique of film itself, a working through of the disintegrating boundary markers between the self and the spectacle of the self. In some sense, cinema has been involved in the history of bodily technologies that have sought to produce a malleable and administrable subjectivity utterly transparent to the purposes of production and culture, and yet which rebels against this administration. In the charming robots, from Robbie in *Forbidden*

1 Donna Haraway, 'A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology and socialist feminism in the 1980s', in *Socialist Review*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1985), pp. 65–107.

2 Francis Lacassin, *Pour une contre-histoire du cinéma* (Paris: 10/18, 1972).

3 Garrett Stewart, 'The "videology" of science fiction', in George E. Slusser (ed.), *Shadows of the Magic Lamp: Fantasy and Science Fiction in Film* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), pp. 159–207.

Planet to the cycle of cute robot films in the 1970s and 1980s inaugurated by C3PO and R2D2 from *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), and in such tropes as the emergence of Schwarzenegger's character Quaid from the interior of a female android in *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), we can then witness the emergence of a resistant human spirit, frequently with the aid of a feminized 'other', from the interior of a public, masculinized and overly rationalist body. This resistance of the body to control is, as Telotte argues, comforting, suggesting the universality of a specific kind of humanism. And yet the fact that such films need to be made demonstrates an uncertainty which that assertion has been made in order to answer, an uncertainty which Telotte locates in the schizophrenic identification with and fear of, fascination with and loathing for, the hybrid human-android which our technologies now promise that we can, and perhaps must, become.

Telotte's book, like the others reviewed here, is not strictly a work of film scholarship, but of cultural studies. There is little by way of close readings of the filmic procedures employed in his texts, rather a 'literary' interpretation of narratives as symptom. The strong influence of Baudrillard leads him to ignore the changing means of production that so strongly characterize the cinematic twentieth century, the transformations of factory labour and the casualization of increasingly mobile labour forces. This, I think, weakens the arguments, as it emphasizes culture to the exclusion of the economic, or indeed the political, narrowing the sense of what it has been to live in this period. Work, it seems, has slowly drifted out of the cultural studies academy, especially in its post-Marxist phases outside the still Gramscian cores of the British school. It is, I suggest, more important to understand these films from the perspective of, for example, the proletarianized retail industry, than from that of potential cosmetic surgery patients. Telotte explains his reluctance to make gender a central issue of his book: he has not done the same for class.

This is a flaw that also mars the work in Claudia Springer's book, which simply presumes the accuracy of the word 'postindustrial' in her title without further analysis or exploration. For the book to work, it is necessary to accept that there exists a certain *couche* of society for which industry has indeed ceased to exist, proof perhaps of the immense powers of geography to define perception. That said, however, Springer's is (like Telotte's) a fascinating read, not least because of her interest in the graphic novel, a form which grabbed headlines but little critical attention during the 1980s and early 1990s (barring Springer's 1991 piece, first published in *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 3 and reprinted here). Springer's focus is on the linkages of sexuality and hard technology – mechanical, industrial and electronic – in an age in which she perceives the kind of dissolution of the body proclaimed by the Krokiers: 'the (natural) body in the postmodern condition has *already* disappeared, and what we experience as the body is only a fantastic simulacr[um] of body rhetorics' (p. 40, citing

4 Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (eds), *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 22.

Body Invaders).⁴ Faced with the propositions of roboticist Hans Moravec and artificial intelligence researcher Marvin Minsky, to the effect that the dematerialization of consciousness is an imminent technical possibility, Springer undertakes a study of the ways in which the construction of a posthuman cyborg existence is marked by histories of gendering. Her concern is to support the kinds of technologically informed utopian feminism of writers like Haraway and Avital Ronell, with their insistence upon the possibilities of eradicating binary hierarchies. Yet at the same time, because of her concern with representation as core of culture, she finds it difficult to escape the predominance of the very binaries she wants to demolish.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day proves a crux. Schwarzenegger, villain of the first film, has become the equally heavily armoured hero of the second, a protector who will, in the end, offer himself in sacrifice, while his opponent, the implacable T-1000, is literally mercurial, liquid and protean, and so 'the embodiment of "feminine" fluidity' (p. 112). This leads her to periodize a postmodern crisis of patriarchy as the root cause of the complex ambiguities of this and a spate of other popular cultural accounts of a posthuman near-future, and to spy as utopian principle the spaces that crisis leaves open for feminist interpretation. Springer falls victim to a vicious spiral of presumptions which are endemic in cultural studies. The insistence on the centrality of representation (as opposed to communication, mediation and interpretation) establishes as core the relation between image and reality in an opposition in which reality will always be the loser. That founding binarism then doubles back in the reading of text as symptom of a preexisting real which is, despite its evaporation in representation, more foundational than the image of it. Within this logic of doubling, the typical (such as the equation of femininity and fluidity) becomes more important than the instance, the essential more important than the material, and the critic is caught finally in a logic of resistance and subversion to a cultural formation always presumed to be, and discursively constructed as, dominant. The resistant is dependent for its identity on the othering of that domination. What such a cultural studies lacks is a materialist sense of both the histories of cultural formations and the actualities of mediation, and although Springer gives a good digest of some of the literature on the history of the human-machine interface, she is reluctant to engage with the medium – specificity of her examples, treating comics, films, television and novels alike as allegorical structures for a real which they both subsume and depend upon.

A sign of the emergent idealism in cultural studies has been the expansion of work on 'the Body', an entity of stunning immateriality. Springer, for example, references in passing Villiers de l'Isle Adam's 1886 parable *L'Eve future*, a story of a fictional Edison building an immaculate female automaton. Following Michelson,⁵ she reads the tale as allegory of the construction of ideal femininity in the

5 Annette Michelson, 'On the eve of the future: the reasonable facsimile and the philosophical toy', *October*, no. 29 (1984), pp. 3–20.

- 6 Raymond Bellour, 'Ideal Hadaly', *Camera Obscura*, no. 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 111–34.

- 7 Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

mechanical media, a presentiment of cinema's gendering functions. Yet not only does this reading ignore the theme of the industrialization of femininity (the emergence of cosmetic and fashion industries associated with the early department stores and illuminated by Edison's lightbulb), it misses the fierce irony of Villiers's text, in which the ideal female is explicitly created as what Bellour calls 'the Narcissistic double' of her patron-lover Lord Ewald,⁶ and the consequent ambivalence of the text towards the ideality of an artifice which is without autonomy from its makers. It is that autonomy which makes bodies, not the body; which, in liberating us from our divine maker, has made us humans rather than humanity. The discursive construction of the body as object produces it as essential type, as perpetual object in perpetual binary opposition to some other – mind, discourse, society – which it is condemned merely to resist.

Anne Balsamo's monograph is an excellent unpicking of the discursive model of bodily production, thoroughly grounded in the materiality of cultural practices, and theoretically sophisticated, in a manner pioneered by Lisa Cartwright's work in medical imaging.⁷ Her conclusions on the use of perspective in immersive virtual reality give an effective critique of the discursive tendency in cultural studies, arguing that the repression of the body is technologically naturalized 'because we have internalized the technological gaze to such an extent that "perspective" is a naturalized organizing locus of sense knowledge. As a consequence, the body, as a sense apparatus, is nothing more than excess baggage for the cyberspace traveller' (p. 125). Her book traces the process by which bodies are dematerialized in modern culture, suppressed in the dominion of the eye/I, and so reformulable as other, as feminine. The bodies of women, then, are doubly rematerialized as both corporeal, and as the raw materials of a new family of technologies, from body-building to reproductive technology, cosmetic surgery to Virtual Valerie (the infamous computer sex-toy).

In a chapter on 'Public Pregnancies', for instance, Balsamo treats Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) as a philosophical critique of contemporary reproduction, analysing the language as well as the narrative as they articulate (rather than allegorize) the criminalization of pregnancy in a medical regime which increasingly understands the foetus as the primary patient in obstetric medicine. Moreover, Balsamo is unafraid of a thoughtful use of statistical evidence and journalistic accounts of legal interventions into pregnancies. In chapters on female body-builders and on elective surgery, she likewise draws on a variety of sources – *Pumping Iron II: the Women* (George Butler, 1984), medical advertising – to critique the normative functions of a patriarchal division between (male) mind and (female) bodies, but without recourse to a humanist value structure: 'The anti-aesthetics of cyberpunk and grunge fashion, for example, suggest that feminists, too, might wish to abandon our

romantic conceptions of the “natural” body – conceptions that lead us to claim that a surgically refashioned face inevitably marks an oppressed subjectivity’.

These accounts give to her analysis of bodies in cyberspace and networked communications a powerful historical context, such that she can escape the rash assertiveness of technophobe and technophile alike, and insist instead on their hermeneutics: ‘a gendered history of technology: where technology isn’t the means of escape from, or transcendence of, the body, but rather the means of communication and connection with other bodies’ (p. 155). Such an account of the contemporary cultural formation of the USA (and Balsamo is writing specifically about her own country) is an important one for an understanding of the ways in which cinema and, increasingly, television are accommodating themselves to the technologization of everyday life. Alongside a sophisticated critique of postmodern theorizing, she has not lost sight of the material oppression of women (and importantly of women of colour). The real has not disappeared from our communications world: it was never there in the first place (save only in the sense that the Lacanian Real, the unspeakable fact of mortality, is in some Heideggerian sense the motor of all communication). What was there, immutably material, and remains, is the materiality of communication as mediation between people, a relation which, even though it may appear to us like relations between things, defines what it is to be human. The horror of the hive-mind in *Star Trek: First Contact* is embodied in the vile seduction of the Borg queen, a familiarly over-embodied femininity. While Springer and Telotte cling to the US ideology of humanist individualism, Balsamo points a way, through feminism, towards a post-individualist future, a more profoundly disturbing, because more profoundly alien, future.

review:

Robert S. C. Gordon, *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, 324 pp.

YOSEFA LOSHITZKY

Pasolini's provocative work, as well as (and perhaps even more than) his 'heretic' personality, have always captured the imagination of filmgoers and critics alike. Add to that the enigma surrounding the circumstances of his 'scandalous' murder and we get a postmodern variation on the *poète maudit* persona.

As I have argued elsewhere, and as Gordon suggests here, the space occupied by Pasolini as the cursed poet, whose violent life and death epitomize the contradictions inherent in postmodernity, seems to be modelled after some of the more scandalous French modernist artists among which Jean Genet is a prime example. Pasolini's own complicity in the mythologizing of his life is beautifully captured by Gordon, who observes that Pasolini's role 'as a permanent, juridical "accused", a role intimately related to his homosexuality, was embraced and valorized by him. Like Genet, he transformed his unusual life into what Gordon perceptively calls 'a vocabulary of guilt' (p. 81). It is therefore not altogether accidental that out of this discourse of crime and guilt he developed a heretical 'theory' of *sacralità* (reverence) for primal pre-industrial and pre-bourgeois reality (existing today, according to Pasolini, only among peasants and in the Third World). The elevation of Genet to the status of modern saint, and Pasolini's own obsession with saints, sainthood and the sacred, perhaps says something about the contradictions intrinsic to the western artist trapped within the postmodern condition.

In an age of cultural studies when the great 'auteurs', as well as the

1 Among the more recent books in English on Pasolini are: Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Sam Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Indianapolis and London: Indiana University Press and British Film Institute, 1995).

auteuristic approach to cinema, have fallen from grace, Pasolini's life and work still hold the power to intrigue. Gordon's book is yet another interesting contribution to the growing literature in English on the artist's fascinating life and work.¹ Gordon's thorough study of Pasolini's significance 'in the panorama of post-war Italian and European culture' and his attempt 'to understand the exploitation and mythologization of his figure during his life and since' is guided by a search for the 'expressivity of the self and its desires' (p. 1) in Pasolini's overall cultural production. Since Pasolini was one of the most prolific intellectuals in Italy's post-World War II scene, the task that Gordon has taken upon himself is an ambitious one. For the non-Italian, and in particular the Anglo-Saxon, audience, Pasolini is known mostly as a film director, and the majority of the books about him published in English deal with his cinema, paying little attention to his other cultural and political activities. Gordon's book attempts to fill the lacuna left by others, exploring in depth Pasolini's work in different media, as well as his always controversial interventions in Italy's stormy public life. Indeed, as Gordon observes, Pasolini's evolution from young, provincial, fascist poet to prominent, Rome-based, Marxist intellectual and polemicist fits almost paradigmatically into the history of post-World War II Italy and its transformation from an agrarian society into a consumerist postindustrial society. Thus his life narrative acquires symbolic dimensions and may be read as an allegory of Italy's still ongoing 'romance' with fascism.

The book is divided into four parts, each covering a different facet of Pasolini's cultural activities. The first covers Pasolini's public work and, in particular, his engagement with literary and public journalism from his participation in the journals of fascist youth organizations (1942–3), through the cultural and regional politics of Friuli (his birthplace) from 1943–9, to his involvement with the cultural journal *Officina* (from 1955–9), the Communist Party mass-circulated weekly *Vie nuove* (from 1960–5), the cultural–political review founded by Alberto Moravia and Alberto Carocci *Nuovi argomenti* (1966–75), the magazine *Tempo Illustrato* (1968–70), and finally his writing in *Corriere della sera* (1973–5), Italy's most popular daily newspaper. It was there that his critique of 'an homologized, hedonistic and pseudo-permissive Italian society' (p. 68), controlled by the Christian Democrats and the Church, reached its climax. The second part of the book provides an in-depth study of Pasolini's poetry, while part three explores Pasolini's move from poetry into cinema, a move which is viewed by Gordon as an attempt to overcome a crisis in his poetic work as well as in his public role. Cinema, Gordon suggests, was seen by Pasolini 'as a vehicle for linguistic renewal' (p. 228) because it 'seemed to afford an immediacy and plenitude, in its contact with real phenomena and its attenuation of symbolic representation, which in turn promised a parallel plenitude for the subject'. The founding

internal dynamic of Pasolini's cinema is, according to Gordon, 'this triangulation between cinema as a privileged form of representation of reality, reality itself and subjectivity' (p. 189). The last part of the book discusses *Petrolio*, Pasolini's last and unfinished novel.

Pasolini was one of the few filmmakers whose cinematic corpus consists not only of films but also of metadiscourse on film. His 'cinema poetry' was followed by 'a parallel metalanguage in his essays in film semiology' (p. 189). Both realms, Gordon points out, were 'ways to imbricate subjectivity into the film' (p. 189). Pasolini's belief in his authority to control the cinematic medium (despite his privileging of textuality over self-expression in his theoretical, semiological essays) was manifested through the disruption of the naturalism of film, a disruption which had its roots in neorealism but which nevertheless worked to 'undermine the naturalistic effects of neorealist and traditional cinema in general' (p. 192) in order to break away from prose cinema and to create poetic cinema characterized by raw, unpolished immediacy and a 'non-professional' look.

Pasolini's cinematic practice, as Gordon observes, is founded 'on a poetics of the gaze or look. It drastically reduces dialogue and promotes, often to excess, the visual and the static' (p. 209). Yet, Gordon stresses, Pasolini destroys the erotic power of the gaze, and turns it into the look of a desire for 'essential, ontological plenitude' (p. 213). Through his oneiric style and the radical otherness of his cinema, Pasolini tried to create 'a newly radical language for ideology' (p. 213).

Gordon traces three key motifs in Pasolini's cinema: death, eating and desire. These dominant motifs 'are those images and acts which come to represent, through overdetermined repetition, archetypal human impulses' (p. 214). Yet despite their archetypal dimension, these motifs connote a political and historical critique of capitalism, and consumerist neocapitalism. This critique is epitomized by Pasolini's last film *Salò* (1975) which, through its juxtaposition of perversion, death, eating and desire, brings his critique of consumption and consumerism (which first emerged in *Il Porcile* [1969]) full circle.

In the age of cultural studies, rarely does one encounter a book like Gordon's: well researched, erudite, and scholarly in the best (elitist?) tradition. Unfortunately, those very strengths which make it so useful for a specialized readership might make it less accessible to the general film audience. What is missing, perhaps, for film studies scholars and students is a broader attempt on Gordon's side to contextualize Pasolini's cinema within the framework of Italian and European cinema. After all, Pasolini was, as he himself was the first to acknowledge, one of those 'delicate flowers of the bourgeoisie', along with Godard, Straub and Huillet, Bertolucci and others, who were associated in the mind of filmgoers and critics alike with the rise of political left radical cinema in Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s'. Pasolini's homosexuality, his obsession with sodomy and

anality taken as a metaphor for the capitalist system of oppression/repression – or in Godard's language 'the society of the ass' – were dominant motifs in the work of radical filmmakers like Godard and Bertolucci (the latter began his cinematic career as Pasolini's assistant in *Accatone* [1961]) whose films constantly and consciously cross-refer to one another.

On several occasions, while reading Gordon's book, I had the impression that the author's eagerness to demonstrate his thesis regarding the dominance of the subjective discourse in Pasolini's cinema made him negligent towards issues such as Pasolini's shift from fascism to Marxism (though a 'heretic' one) or his regressive (reactionary?) utopianism. These contradictions in Pasolini's politics, though not ignored by Gordon, require further explanation. Also, the very detailed and dense study, in particular of Pasolini's journalistic projects, creates the impression that one cannot see the wood for the trees, and the numerous and long citations in Italian and French (some of them not translated) sometimes make the text difficult to follow. It might, I am afraid, scare the non-expert reader. Paradoxically, as I pointed out before, those very 'flaws' are the result of Gordon's excellent and impressive scholarship and they will hopefully attract those who are interested in Pasolini in particular and in Italian cinema and culture in general.

review:

**Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 824pp.**

TOM RYALL

The cinema's one-hundred-year history has produced thousands of films from most countries of the world. This has not deterred historians from trying to distil this global phenomenon into single-volume studies, and although 'a daunting task' (to quote Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's introduction), there may be a logic at work in so far as film from its very origins had a built-in international quality. Early film – mute (not language-bound) – was easily reproducible and transportable. The films of the Lumière Brothers, Georges Méliès, of Edison and the Pathé company, transcended their national origins and established the credentials of the medium on the basis of images comprehensible in most parts of the world, images which even when tied in specific ways to their origins nevertheless travelled well. Subsequently, cinema's global character was confirmed through the impact on the world's screens of one cinema – the North American – which often dictated the form and content of international cinema but which also provided a clear template against which many national cinemas have defined themselves.

Anglo-American Film Studies in the 1970s, although dominated by theoretical approaches, did find room for some historical work, for example, Tino Balio's work on Hollywood; but it was the 1980s which saw an increased interest in history and the development of micro-studies of specific periods from the history of the medium. 'Early cinema' (the work generated by the Brighton FIAF conference of 1978), and Hollywood in the studio period (Bordwell, Thompson

¹ Eric Rhode, *A History of the Cinema From its Origins to 1970*. (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1978); David Robinson, *World Cinema* (London: Methuen, 1973).

² Robert Sklar, *Film: an International History of the Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); David Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 3rd Edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1996); Douglas Gomery, *Movie History: a Survey* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1991); Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: an Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994).

and Staiger) were but two of the areas subjected to detailed research and analysis, and although some global histories were written during this period, mostly from outside the academy,¹ it was not until the 1990s that university-based writers schooled in 'modern Film Studies' began to produce works of macro-history. Several volumes, covering a wide range of cinemas and the entire temporal span of film history from its origins to the present, have been published in recent years, and prominent amongst these are Robert Sklar's *Film: an International History of the Medium*, David Cook's *A History of Narrative Film*, Douglas Gomery's *Movie History: a Survey* and Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell's *Film History: an Introduction*.² Clearly aimed at the undergraduate market, such volumes present synoptic accounts of major areas of filmmaking, offering the reader the sweep and scope of film history. All are essential to a college Film Studies library as reference points for an understanding of the complexity of the medium's hundred-year history, and *The Oxford History of World Cinema* must take its place with the above. It differs from the other histories mentioned in so far as Nowell-Smith has not tackled 'the daunting task' of compressing the cinema's history into a single volume by himself, or even with a partner, but has assembled an impressive array of around eighty film historians contributing detailed articles based on their specialist expertise of this or that film movement, film genre, or national cinema. Many of them are familiar names, including three of the historians cited above – Robinson, Gomery and Bordwell. Specific national cinemas and genres are covered by individuals widely acknowledged as authoritative in relation to their topic: Richard Abel and Ginette Vincendeau on French cinema; Thomas Elsaesser on German cinema; Yuri Tsivian on early Russian cinema; Douglas Gomery on the Hollywood studio system; Richard Maltby on censorship; Edward Buscombe on the Western genre. Although the majority of the writers are from Britain and the USA, there are contributors from Russia, Hong Kong, India, Australia and Japan, as well as from a number of European countries.

Many global histories, from Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now*, published in 1930, to the academic works cited above, use the term 'film' in their titles, whereas Nowell-Smith opts for 'cinema'. This is not a minor lexical point and it turns on the distinction 'cinema/film' in which the former connotes an institution – 'the moving image as a form of collective entertainment' – as well as the actual films which are assumed to be the focal point of our studies. As the editor states in the introduction:

The boundaries of cinema . . . are wider than just the films that the institution produces and puts into circulation. They include the audience, the industry, and the people who work in it – from stars to technicians to usherettes – and the mechanisms of regulation and

control which determine which films audiences are encouraged to see and which they are not.' (p. xix)

The notion of cinema as institution also spills into 'history in the broader sense' and many of the pieces in this collection seek to set specific trends and genres in a context of relevant national, social and political trends. The emphasis in the book is also upon popular cinema. It is not just a history of canonical texts, and this is brought home forcibly by, for example, Ginette Vincendeau's piece on the French cinema of the 1930s. As we all know, French film of this period is Renoir and Poetic Realism. However, as Vincendeau points out, the French cinema of the time was actually dominated by musicals, filmed theatre, military comedies, music-hall influenced genres, with Renoir and the Poetic Realists (Carné, Duvivier) constituting a strand of cinema admired by critics both in France and abroad, but not particularly representative of the cinema of the time, and not especially indicative of the popular experience of cinema by French audiences.

The volume is organized in three large chronological sections covering silent cinema (1895–1930), sound cinema (1930–1960), and modern cinema (1960–1995). However, as the work moves through history and introduces new cinemas as they emerge, a certain amount of tracking back takes place, upsetting the neat chronology above. To take an example, Jim Pines's piece on the black presence in US cinema, although situated in the modern cinema section, goes back to the Kinetoscope period in the 1890s and presents a concise and comprehensive overview of the subject. Indeed, many of the essays in the modern section, including those dealing with African and Asian cinemas, trace back through history to position the cinemas in their modern context. At the heart of each section is the cluster of articles on specific national cinemas, but these are accompanied and supplemented by a variety of related essays covering genres (the Western, the musical, comedy), non-feature production (documentary, animation, serials), and a range of synoptic topics. These include: the world-wide spread of cinema in the early period; censorship in classic Hollywood; areas such as art cinema and exploitation films; the influence of television; the role of technology from the Latham Loop to sub-commercial film gauges and video; film music in different periods. In addition, there are a number of linking and reflective pieces by the editor which help to provide an overall shape and form to the diverse narratives of the individual pieces. Each of the individual essays has a short bibliography cross-referenced to the overall comprehensive and detailed bibliography. A final feature is the inclusion of 'insets' scattered throughout the book – set off from the main text though usually related to it in some way – providing a series of brief chronicles on individuals whose contribution to the development of cinema requires acknowledgement in a 'definitive'

volume: D.W. Griffith, Marilyn Monroe, Ingmar Bergman, Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Renoir and so on. The insets, however, are not confined to canonical figures, and there are entries for individuals less familiar to an Anglo-American readership from non-western cinemas, including Japanese director Daisuke Ito, Arab filmmaker Youssef Chahine, and Hindi female star Nargis; a selection of independent women filmmakers (Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman); documentarists (Humphrey Jennings, Jean Rouch) usually neglected by orthodox histories; and a handful of individuals such as Val Lewton and Oscar Micheaux, whose careers, while not typical, 'throw light on some of the rich diversity and occasional oddity of cinema, and the place it occupies in the world'. The insets also include 'The Loop and the Maltese Cross' (the technical *sine qua non* of cinema), the 'Don'ts and Be Carefuls' from the 1927 Hollywood production code, and Bugs Bunny. The aim of these entries is 'to illuminate cinema across the board' but it is likely to provoke debate according to individual readers' taste. For example, John Wayne is there but Robert Mitchum is not, Satyajit Ray but not Nicholas Ray, Fred Astaire but not Gene Kelly, Sidney Poitier but not Eddie Murphy, Barbara Stanwyck but not James Cagney. Indeed, the omission of Cagney provoked a somewhat hostile review of the book by the *Observer's* Philip French, a critic usually reasonably sympathetic to what emerges from the academy.

Arguments over missing individuals notwithstanding, the *Oxford History* is destined to join the other global histories on the college library shelves and to play a significant role in film history courses. Yet it is a different kind of book from those previously cited, with a target readership probably reaching beyond the undergraduate student to a wider constituency with a serious and maybe professional interest in the cinema. It is also a scholarly work in the sense that the individual contributions have a depth deriving from the special expertise of the various contributors; a depth which writers individually, or even in tandem, attempting a similar range of coverage, cannot hope to achieve. This is not to set the *Oxford History* against the other histories cited above, but rather to suggest that it be seen as complementary to them. Thompson and Bordwell, in particular, have provided an excellent introduction to 'cinema' history conceived of in terms similar to those outlined by Nowell-Smith – institutions, audiences, technology as well as films – and students can benefit considerably from reading a sustained and continuous limited-perspective account of film's development. However, students also need to consult the kind of in-depth material available on specific areas of cinema impressively presented by the *Oxford History* in order to deepen and extend their knowledge and perception of the complexities of film form and cinema history.